VISIT…

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CLIVE BARKER'S HELLRAISER™

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The Crystal Precipice
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1984

FOREWORD

Every Saturday night, 8 o'clock, Channel 11, it waited—**Chiller Theater**. Offering the best in horror movies an independent station could (which isn't saying much), **Chiller** was memorable for two reasons: 1) the six fingered hand that would come out of a bubbling swamp in the show's opening, gobbling its logo letter-by-letter as a voice intoned "Chiiiiiller," and 2) the fact that every three months **Chiller**'s limited suspense cinema would return it (and me) once more to **The Crawling Eye**.

It made my blood run cold, this never-seen-orb, hiding within a mysterious fog atop a mountain, barely leaving its victims time to scream "EEAAARGGG!" before it took their heads as its foul prize. Heads continued to roll (or not) until intrepid Forrest Tucker (yes, like in **F-Troop**) led a daring expedition (well, to an 8 year old) up the mountain, riding a rickety cable car into that dreaded fog—at which time the inevitable call of "BEDTIME!" would ring out, leaving me to once more wonder fearfully as to the true face (?) of that optic beast.

Well, Channel 11 got respectable and promptly hacked off its six-fingered hand, stranding me with a never-to-be-faced terror in the back of my mind—until that late afternoon my brother Keith and I confronted the horrid jellied sphere for the final time. We watched past the cable car riding up into that fog, waiting for the moment when the Eye, that thing of things, was finally revealed—to most closely resemble a golf ball stuck on a mound of soggy spaghetti. Not that there isn't a certain horror in that, but something had been lost over the years: what would have sent me screaming to a sanitarium as a child now sent me reaching for the remote. And that, gentle reader, is all a rather obtuse way of observing that part of life is about overcoming certain fears—but, fortunately, when we have moved past one terror, there are always new acts of darkness waiting in the wings to perform their danse macabres for us.

Which brings us to this issue's talented cast: "The Crystal Precipice" presents an outer space encore of the Cenobite Face, staged by **Stalkers** co-writer Jan Strnad, penciler Steve Buccellato and longtime inking talent Stan Drake. In between their work on the Moebius graphic novels and scripting the upcoming fantasy-adventure **The Elsewhere Prince**, writers RJM Lofficier stir up "The Blood of the Poet," an eerie tale of Paris in the early 1900's; John Ridgway, hard at work on a science-fiction opus at DC Comics, provides the evocative illustrations. And for our final act, **Hellbound: Hellraiser II** screenwriter Peter Atkins and artist Dave Dorman strike the chords that play the "Songs of Metal and Flesh."

Together with editor Margaret Clark, they promise to take you on a fear-filled rickety cable car ride of your very own. And as you head up that dark mountain and the fog closes around you, a word of advice: Keep your eyes—

EEAAARGGG!

Daniel Chichester
consulting editor

THE CRYSTAL PRECIPICE
"WHAT IS IT, BARRY? A CITY?"
"I CAN'T TELL. IT'S STRANGE--"
"FOR CHRIS' SAKES, IF THAT'S THE BEST YOU CAN DO, GIVE ME THE BINOCS!"
"SHUT UP, ERNEST. LET HIM LOOK."
OKAY THEN, GIVE ME SOMETHING ELSE TO LOOK AT. YOU'D THINK, AFTER ALL THESE MONTHS--
AFTER ALL THESE MONTHS, YOU'RE STILL THE LAST PERSON I'D WANT TO GET PERSONAL WITH. YOU'VE HEARD THE PHRASE, "FAMILIARITY BREEDS CONTEMPT"?
WAIT A MINUTE! I SEE--I THINK IT'S A MAN!
I THINK IT'S HUMAN. I CAN JUST BARELY MAKE OUT THE FORM, AND I CAN'T REALLY SEE ITS--
ANOTHER HUMAN BEING? IT'S TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE!
IT'S SO FAR OFF, IT'S HARD TO TELL FOR SURE.
MAG
"--FACE."
JAN STRAND STORY
STEVE BUCCELLATO PENCILS
STAN DRAKE INKS
SHERILYN VANVALKENBURGH COLORING
MICHAEL HEISLER LETTERS

LOOK! IT'S THOSE LIGHTS AGAIN, LIKE WE SAW FROM THE AIR! THEY'RE COMING THIS WAY!
WHAT ARE THEY, BARRY? MAYBE WE SHOULD GO BACK INSIDE--
I SAY WE BRING 'EM DOWN BEFORE THEY GET ANY CLOSER! WHO KNOWS WHAT THEY ARE? SOME KIND OF MISSILES, MAYBE!
DON'T BE AN IDIOT, ERNEST. IF THEY ARE INTELLIGENTLY GUIDED, WE HAVE TO SHOW OUR PEACEFUL INTENTIONS-- UNLESS THEY STRIKE FIRST.
THEY LOOK CRYSTALLINE, LIKE THE CITY. COULD THEY BE INTELLIGENT?
WELL, THEY'RE MORE THAN JUST SOME CHANCE, AERIAL PHENOMENON, I KNOW THAT. THEY MOVE SLOWLY, BUT THEY MADE A BEELINE STRAIGHT FOR US.
LOOK HOW THEY FLOAT THERE, LIKE THEY'RE WATCHING US.
"WATCH" IS NOT THE WORD, BUT IT IS THE CONCEPT.
MY PERFECT, CRYSTALLINE FRIENDS DO NOT "LOOK", BUT THEY CAN SEE. THEY DO NOT "THINK", BUT THEY ARE FILLED WITH WONDER. THEY DO NOT "TALK", BUT THE DISCOURSE BETWEEN THEM IS BEAUTIFUL AND HARMONIOUS.
IT'S TOO LATE TO START FOR THE CITY TODAY. FIRST THING TOMORROW MORNING.

THE FLESHY INVADERS DO NOT APPRECIATE MY FRIENDS AS I DO. THEY ARE DISCORDANT NOTES IN THE MUSIC OF THIS WORLD. THEY ARE ANGRY DISSONANCES.
I SAY WE GO NOW. BEFORE THAT GUY BUGS OUT.
IT IS FOR THEM THE PRECIPICE WAS CONSTRUCTED. IT IS THIS WORLD'S PUZZLE. ONE OF THEM WILL SOLVE IT, AND HE WILL BRING THE WILL OF LEVIATHAN TO BEAR ON THE OTHERS.
THE FLESH IS NOT WANTED HERE. IT IS NOT WANTED ON THIS PERFECT, ORDERED WORLD, THIS EDEN OF ROCK AND DUST AND CRYSTAL.
HE'LL STILL BE THERE TOMORROW. I DON'T WANT TO GET CAUGHT OUTSIDE THE SHIP AFTER DARK.
MY FRIENDS WILL NOT KNOW WHAT TO MAKE OF THE EVENTS TO FOLLOW. THEY ARE TOO PERFECT TO COMPREHEND THE UGLINESS OF THE FLESH--
--OR ITS WEAKNESSES, OR ITS EVIL.
YOU'RE THE BOSS. BUT IF HE'S GONE WHEN WE GET THERE, DON'T BLAME ME.

DON'T MAKE A SOUND.
YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO. IT'S JUST LIKE BEFORE. NOTHING'S ANY DIFFERENT NOW.
YOU KNOW YOU WANT IT. YOU *WANT* IT, YOU *WANT* IT, YOU *WANT* IT--
AAAGH!

WHANG! WHANG!
CRUNCH! WHAP!
WH-WHAT'S GOING ON? WHAT IS IT?
BARRY! STOP IT! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
I'M TEACHING THIS WEASEL A LESSON, THAT'S WHAT! TEACHING HIM TO STAY IN HIS OWN GODDAMN BUNK AT NIGHT!
ANDREA, YOU POOR DEAR! DID HE--?
IT WASN'T THE FIRST TIME. I...I WAS AFRAID TO SAY ANYTHING--
TOSS HIM OUTSIDE. IF HE SHOWS HIS FACE AGAIN, I SWEAR TO GOD I'LL BLOW IT TO DUST.
ANDREA? IT'S YOUR CALL. WHAT DO YOU SAY WE DO WITH HIM?
FEED HIM.
FEED HIM HIS BALLS.

YOU...YOU AREN'T GOING TO DO...LIKE SHE SAID!
I COULD LIVE WITH THAT.
YOU'LL ANSWER FOR IT!
TO WHO, ERNEST? ONLY TWO OTHER PEOPLE WILL KNOW, AND THEY BOTH HATE YOU MORE THAN I DO! LOOK--
WE'RE STUCK HERE, THE SHIP'S GROUNDED. WE'VE GOT FOOD FOR A WEEK, MAYBE. THIS PLANET'S LIFELESS --TOTALLY! NOT SO MUCH AS A GERM IN ANY OF THE SAMPLES WE TOOK!
YOU'VE BEEN NOTHING BUT A PAIN IN THE ASS SINCE YOU SIGNED ABOARD. I'M NOT SPENDING MY LAST WEEK WONDERING WHOSE FOOD YOU'RE STEALING, WHO YOU'RE RAPING WHEN I'M NOT AROUND.
WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO? YOU GONNA SHOOT ME OR WHAT?
I COULD. MAYBE I WILL. BUT RIGHT NOW--
--MY IMPULSE IS TO SEE YOU RUN. AS FAST AS YOUR LEGS CAN CARRY YOU.
RUN, ERNEST! GET OUT OF PISTOL RANGE BEFORE I CHANGE MY MIND! AND REMEMBER --I'M A DAMN GOOD SHOT!
RUN, DAMN IT! RUN!
MY FRIENDS CANNOT COMPREHEND. BUT I DO. I COMPREHEND WELL THE FLESHY DEPRAVITIES THAT HAVE BROUGHT US TO THIS POINT. AND I KNOW--
I HAVE FOUND MY INSTRUMENT.

ADMIT IT, BARRY. YOU GOOFED. YOU MISJUDGED THE DISTANCE. WE'LL NEVER MAKE THE CITY BY NIGHTFALL.
I DON'T GET IT. IT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN MORE THAN TWENTY MILES AWAY. WE SHOULD'VE BEEN THERE BY NOW!
IT HAPPENS, BARRY. IT'S AN OPTICAL ILLUSION.
WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE? WE DIE IN ONE SPOT OR ANOTHER. ANY SIGN OF ERNEST?
NO, I DON'T THINK WE'LL SEE ERNEST AGAIN.
THESE CRYSTAL THINGS ARE GETTING ON MY NERVES. THEY'VE FOLLOWED US THE WHOLE WAY. I WONDER--
WHAT WOULD THEY DO IF WE TURNED AROUND, FORGOT ABOUT GOING TO THE CITY? WOULD THEY LET US GO BACK?
WE'LL GO ON FOR ANOTHER FEW HOURS, THEN MAKE CAMP. LOOKS LIKE WE'RE SLEEPING UNDER THE STARS TONIGHT.
ALL IN ALL, I'D RATHER HAVE A FIRE.
WE SHOULDN'T HAVE LET ANDREA GO OFF ALONE. MODESTY BE DAMNED.
ANDREA! SOUND OFF--LET US KNOW YOU'RE OUT THERE!
DAMN IT--
BE CAREFUL.

WHAT NOW, FACE? WHAT DO I DO WITH HER?
WHATEVER YOU LIKE.
YOU BRAVED THE PRECIPICE, YOU PAID THE PRICE--ONLY AN OUNCE OF FLESH--AND NOW MY BOUNTY IS YOURS. DO WHAT YOU WILL WITH HER. INDULGE YOUR IMAGINATION.
MMPH, NNFF--
PITY. NOW WE'LL HAVE TO KILL HER QUICKLY, BEFORE SHE ATTRACTS THE ATTENTION OF THE OTHERS.
ANDREA! WHERE ARE YOU? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? ANDREA!
HERE. I'LL DO IT.
ANDREA, DAMN IT! SAY SOMETHING! ANDREA!
OH, CHRIST--

ERNEST, DAMN YOU TO HELL! DAMN YOU! YOU'LL PAY FOR THIS, YOU BASTARD! I PROMISE IT!
LET ME KILL HIM, FACE! GIVE ME THE STRENGTH, AND I KNOW I CAN TAKE HIM!
IN GOOD TIME, MY FRIEND.
"EVERYTHING IN ITS TIME."
WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO HER BODY? I MEAN, WILL IT DECOMPOSE HERE? THERE'S NO LIFE TO BREAK IT DOWN, TO MAKE SOME-THING NEW OUT OF... OUT OF--

IT'S ALL JUST A BIG WASTE, ISN'T IT? THERE ISN'T EVEN ANY KIND OF CYCLE TO MAKE IT ALL MAKE SENSE!
WE DON'T KNOW THAT, MAYBE WHEN WE GET TO THE CITY--
THE CITY! WE DON'T EVEN KNOW THAT IT IS A CITY!
AND WHAT ARE THOSE DAMN THINGS? ALWAYS THERE, HANGING ON EVERY MOVE WE MAKE!
GO AWAY! LEAVE US ALONE! LET US DIE IN PEACE, DAMN IT!
FELICE, STOP IT! PUT THE GUN AWAY!
FELICE! COME BACK! WE HAVE TO STAY TOGETHER!
ERNEST HAS AGREED TO MAKE AN ADDITIONAL PAYMENT. HE WANTS TO HANDLE THIS ONE ON HIS OWN. I THINK I'LL LET HIM.
IT'S TIME TO LET THEM REACH THE PRECIPICE.

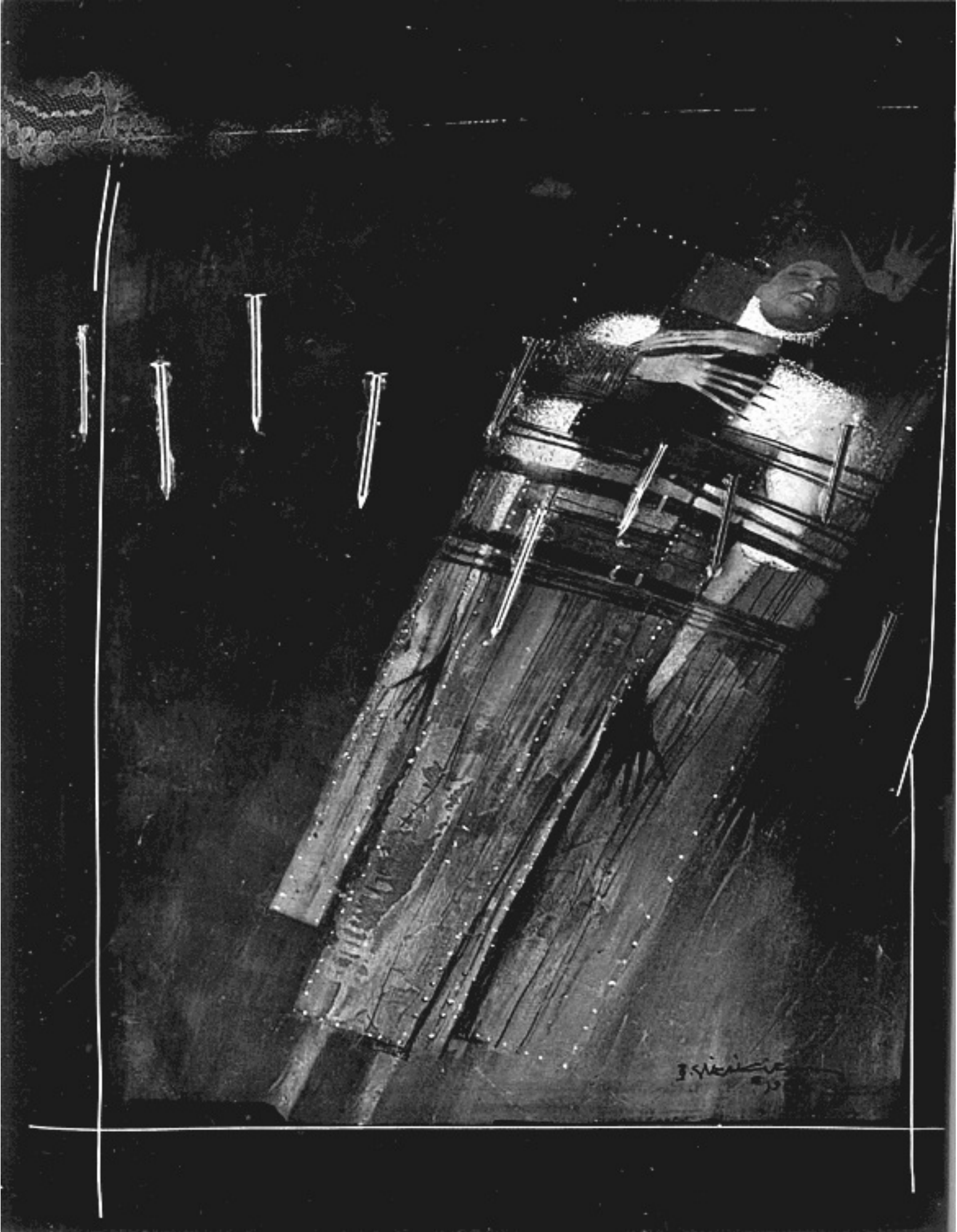
OH, GREAT! THAT'S JUST WHAT WE NEED!
MY GOD. I CAN'T... I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT--
"COME OUT NOW, ERNEST. YOUR FRIENDS ARE HERE."

WELL, THAT'S THAT. WE'RE NOT GETTING OVER TO THE SPIRES, AND FROM THE LOOKS OF THEM, THERE ISN'T ANY REASON WHY WE SHOULD WANT TO.
I'M LOOKING AT ONE VERY GOOD REASON.
MAG
ERNEST. AND HE'S GUZZLING WATER LIKE HE'S GOT A SWIMMING POOL OF THE STUFF.
I SEE HIM! OH, NOW HE'S WAVING!
"IT'S A TRICK. HE JUST WANTS US TO KILL OURSELVES TRYING TO REACH HIM."
"HE MADE IT. WE CAN TOO."
WE'RE LOSING THE LIGHT. IT'D BE CRAZY TO START ACROSS THIS LATE IN THE DAY.
TOMORROW, WE GO AFTER THE SONUVABITCH.
LIFE DOESN'T JUST SPRING FROM NOWHERE, BARRY. AND IT DOESN'T JUST DRY UP AND BLOW AWAY WHEN AN ORGANISM DIES.
IF THESE CRYSTAL THINGS ARE SOMEHOW ALIVE--OR IF THERE'S AN INTELLIGENT LIFE CONTROLLING THEM--THERE SHOULD BE SOME EVIDENCE OF AN ECOLOGY! MICRO-ORGANISMS... SOME KIND OF A FOOD CHAIN--
I KNOW. TALK ABOUT AN "ALIEN" PLANET, THIS ONE TAKES THE CAKE.

I HAVE TO TAKE A LEAK.
WHAT HAPPENED TO "MODESTY BE DAMNED"?
OLD INHIBITIONS DIE HARD, DON'T WORRY, I'LL BE RIGHT HERE.
YEAH, WELL, BE QUICK ABOUT IT. THAT'S WHEN HE GOT ANDREA, YOU KNOW.
JEEZ--YOU DID HAVE A BLADDER FULL! YOU GOING TO STAND THERE ALL NIGHT?
PIDDAH PIDDAH PADDAH PADDAH PIDDAH PIDDAH
THE WOMAN'S MOUTH OPENS WIDE, HER JAW TREMBLES, BUT NO SOUND COMES FORTH.
PADDAH PADDAH PIDDAH PIDDA
I GOT YOU, BABE, AND BABY, BABY, BABY--

AAAAGH!
LIKE HELL--
NICELY DONE, GIRL. A LITTLE RAGGED, BUT A DECENT IMPROVISATION.
WELL? ARE YOU GOING TO JUST SIT THERE? AREN'T YOU GOING AFTER HER?
SHE RIPPED MY FACE! IT HURTS, FACE!
YES. EXQUISITE, ISN'T IT? BUT YOU CAN'T LET THAT DIVERT YOU FROM YOUR MISSION.
DAMN IT, I'M THROUGH FOOLING AROUND, DOING EVERYTHING YOUR WAY! I'M TAKING THE BITCH OUT!
ERNEST, PLEASE. TRY TO RISE ABOVE YOUR CHARACTER. TRY TO SHOW SOME STYLE--
SHUT UP, FACE!
PLEASE, BE CAREFUL! YOU DON'T KNOW THE RISK--
I SAID SHUT UP!
BLOW
OH, ERNEST. NOW YOU'VE DONE IT.

I-IT WAS AN ACCIDENT, FACE! I DIDN'T MEAN TO HIT IT! I W-WAS AIMING FOR THE WOMAN, YOU KNOW THAT!
NONETHELESS, YOU'VE DESTROYED ONE OF THE PERFECT BEINGS OF THIS BEAUTIFUL, FLESHLESS WORLD. AND DO YOU KNOW THE IRONY OF IT, ERNEST?
YOU COULD HAVE BEEN ONE OF THOSE BEINGS, JUST AS YOUR FRIENDS WILL BE, NOW THAT THEIR SOULS HAVE BEEN FREED OF THE FLESH!
YES, THEY WILL BE BACK, ERNEST! BUT NOT YOU! NOT AS SOMETHING SO PURE AND PERFECT!
WE HAVE A CHAMBER IN HELL FOR THE LIKES OF YOU! WE CENOBITES LIKE OUR PETS, THE SAME AS YOU DO, BUT OURS ARE MORE... COMPLEX!
SOME ASSEMBLY IS REQUIRED.
FACE, NO! GIVE ME ANOTHER CHANCE! PLEASE!
BEING A PET ISN'T SO BAD. A LITTLE PAINFUL DURING THE RE-CONSTRUCTION, AND YOU'LL NEVER FEEL QUITE YOUR OLD SELF AGAIN. BUT WE'LL BE SO CLOSE--
IT COULD BE THE BEGINNING OF A BEAUTIFUL FRIENDSHIP...
The End



WHAT I MOST REMEMBER ARE THE SMELLS. THE SWEET SMELLS OF PARIS IN SEPTEMBER...
...IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1925.

NOW, THEY CALL THEM THE CRAZY YEARS. BUT THEY WERE SO MUCH MORE. THEY RESHAPED THE OLD ORDER, SWEPT AWAY WHAT LITTLE THE GREAT WAR HAD LEFT.
PARIS WAS THE CAPITAL OF THE AVANT-GARDE. JAZZ AND THE SURREALISTS REIGNED ON THE RIVE GAUCHE.

PICASSO, WHOSE PAINTINGS SCANDALIZED THE BOURGEOIS, PROUDLY PROCLAIMED: "I'M NOT LOOKING, I'VE FOUND IT!"

AND I, A NAIVE MIDWESTERN BOY WHO HAD DECIDED TO LIVE IN THE EYE OF THIS TORNADO, SOUGHT A BED...

...OR RATHER, SOMEONE WILLING TO TAKE A CHANCE ON A STRUGGLING, YOUNG POET, WITH NO MEANS OF SUPPORT.
OTEL

I STILL REMEMBER THE INTOXICATING SMELL OF FREEDOM IN THE AIR, OF FUTURES UNBOUND...
...OF REBIRTH!

I NEVER THINK OF THAT SMELL WITHOUT SEEING THE TALL, GAUNT FIGURE OF JEAN COCTEAU SITTING AT LA COUPOLE.

HIS PLAIN-CHANT HAD STIRRED MY BLOOD, MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE, HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR MY BECOMING A POET.
WHEN I ASKED IF HE WOULD LOOK AT MY POEMS, HE REMEMBERED MEETING ME AT THE BOEUF SUR LE TOIT.

LATER, HE WROTE ABOUT HIMSELF AND POETRY:
"BY POURING MY BLUE INK IN THEM, I MADE THE GHOSTS TURN VISIBLE. TO SAY THAT THE TASK IS SIMPLE OR WITHOUT DANGER WOULD BE INSANE. TO DARE DISTURB THE ANGELS.

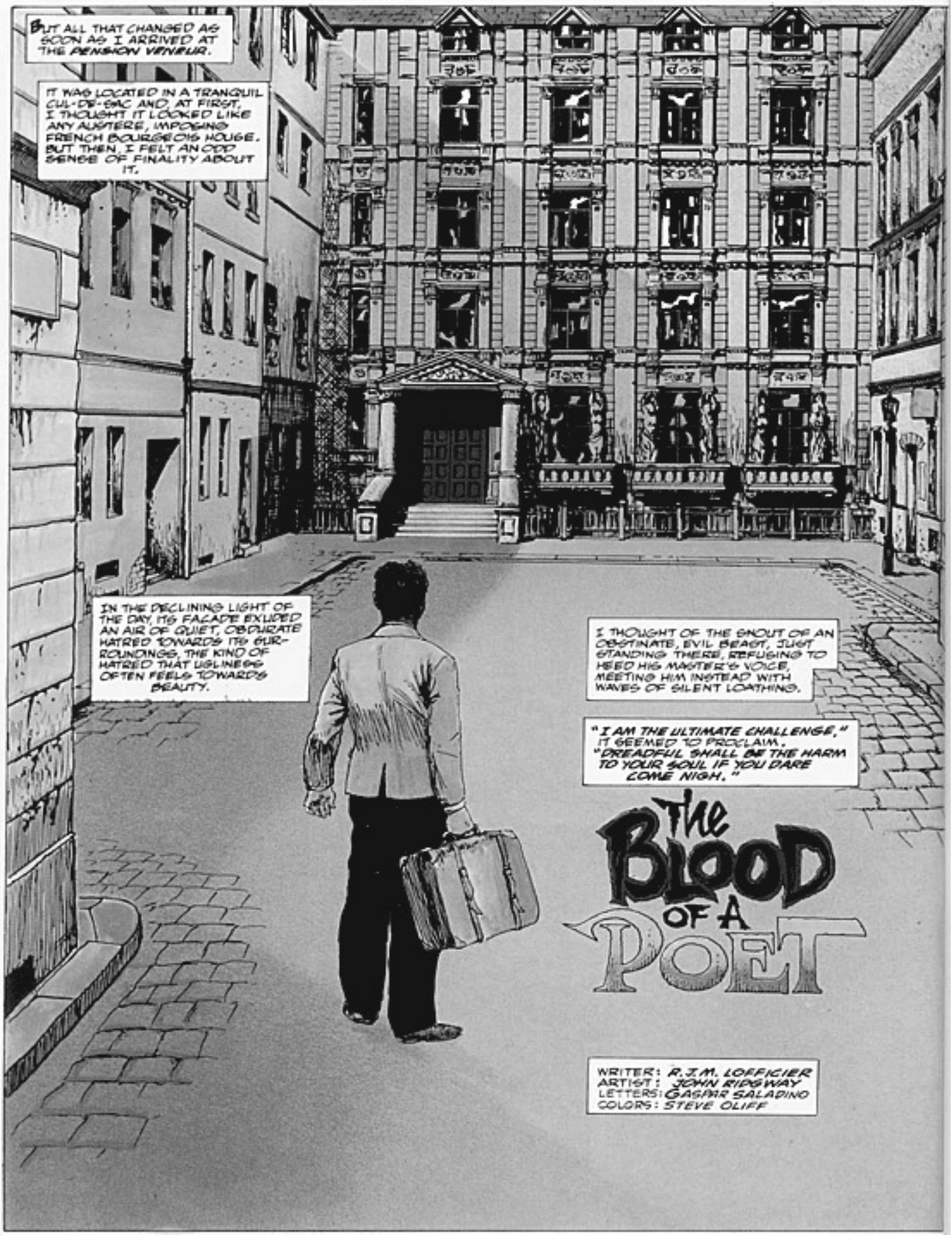
AND THAT, HE TOLD ME, MY POEMS DID NOT DO!
BUT WHAT COULD I KNOW OF DISTURBING THE ANGELS WHEN THE ONLY THING I HAD EXPERIENCED WERE THE PURE SKIES...
...AND GOLDEN FIELDS OF MY NATIVE KANSAS?

I REMEMBER CASTING MY EYES AROUND, LOOKING FOR A SIGN, ANY SIGN.
THEN, I SAW IT, THE EYE OF PAN.
L'Oeil
Du Faun

IT WAS ONE OF THE MANY BOOKSTORES IN PARIS, DABBLING IN A MIXTURE OF POETRY AND THE OCCULT.
IT WAS EXACTLY MY KIND OF BOOKSTORE.

SO, HOW PERFECT THAT IT SHOULD ALSO ADVERTISE ROOMS TO RENT. I ENTERED, AND THERE, I SAW HER...
MELANIE.

SHE LOVED COCTEAU, RIMBAUD, AND EVEN LAUTREAMONT, WHOSE SONGS OF MALDOROR HAD BEEN PASSED AROUND MY COLLEGE IN SECRECY.
I CAN STILL SMELL HER SUBTLE PERFUME, AS IT CUT THROUGH THE STORE'S MUSTY AIR...
...LIKE A BEAM OF SUNLIGHT PIERCING THE CLOUDS.
NONE OF THE ROOMS SHE SUGGESTED WERE WITHIN MY MEAGER BUDGET.
I ASKED IF SHE KNEW OF ANYTHING ELSE, AND CAUGHT HER HESITATION.
WHATEVER SHE MIGHT HAVE SAID REMAINED UNVOICED, SILENCED BY THE ARRIVAL OF HER EMPLOYER.
SHE INTRODUCED HIM AS MONSIEUR DANIEL.
HE REPRIMANDED HER FOR NOT TELLING ME OF THE PENSION VENEUR, ALTHOUGH I CANNOT NOW RECALL IF HE ACTUALLY UTTERED THAT ACCURSED NAME.
THERE WAS NO THUNDERCLAP, NO BOLTS OF LIGHTNING IN THE SKY, MERELY THE SOFT-SPOKEN VOICE OF A YOUNG WOMAN; ONE I DID NOT HEED.
DANIEL EXPLAINED THAT IT HOUSED A COMMUNITY OF ARTISTS WHO LIVED THERE, FREE UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF A TRUST ARRANGED BY A DECEASED PATRON OF THE ARTS.
HE GAVE ME THE ADDRESS, AND INDICATED THAT THERE HAD BEEN A RECENT VACANCY.
I CLEARLY REMEMBER THAT HE SAID I WOULD BE WELCOMED WITH OPEN ARMS.
AND SO I WAS!
BUT I AM GETTING AHEAD OF MYSELF.
THOSE WHO SPEAK OF POETS' INTUITION COULD NOT HAVE SEEN ME THAT DAY, FOR I FELT NOTHING BUT ELATION AT HAVING FOUND A PLACE TO STAY.


BUT ALL THAT CHANGED AS SOON AS I ARRIVED AT THE PENSION VENFUR.
IT WAS LOCATED IN A TRANQUIL CUL-DE-SAC AND, AT FIRST, I THOUGHT IT LOOKED LIKE ANY AUSTERE, IMPOSING FRENCH BOURGEOIS HOUSE. BUT THEN, I FELT AN ODD SENSE OF FINALITY ABOUT IT.
IN THE DECLINING LIGHT OF THE DAY, ITS FACADE EXUDED AN AIR OF QUIET, OBDURATE HATRED TOWARDS ITS SURROUNDINGS, THE KIND OF HATRED THAT UGLINESS OFTEN FEELS TOWARDS BEAUTY.
I THOUGHT OF THE SNOUT OF AN OBSTINATE, EVIL BEAST, JUST STANDING THERE, REFUSING TO HEED HIS MASTER'S VOICE, MEETING HIM INSTEAD WITH WAVES OF SILENT LOATHING.
"I AM THE ULTIMATE CHALLENGE," IT SEEMED TO PROCLAIM. "DREADFUL SHALL BE THE HARM TO YOUR SOUL IF YOU DARE COME NIGH."
THE BLOOD OF A POET
WRITER: R.J.M. LOFFICIER
ARTIST: JOHN RIDGWAY
LETTERS: GASPAR SALADINO
COLORS: STEVE OLIFF

STILL, THE HOUR WAS LATE, AND PASSING ANOTHER DAMP NIGHT BENEATH A BRIDGE HELD NO CHARM.
THE CONCIERGE WAS A GNOME-LIKE CREATURE, WHOSE NAME, I LATER LEARNED, WAS SEBAUD. AT FIRST, HE LOOKED AT ME WITH SUSPICION.
BUT WHEN I MENTIONED M. DANEL, HIS EYES CLEARED, AND HE CONFIRMED THAT INDEED, THERE HAD BEEN AN UNEXPECTED VACANCY.
HE OFFERED TO TAKE ME TO MONSIEUR BARSAC, THE DIRECTEUR, WHO WOULD DECIDE WHETHER I COULD STAY.
I RECALL AS IF IT WERE YESTERDAY HIS UNHEALTHY WHEEZING AS WE CLIMBED THE GREAT MARBLE STAIR-WAY LINED WITH OLD-FASHIONED OIL PAINTINGS.
HE CAUGHT MY QUESTIONING GLANCE, AND VOLUNTEERED THAT THEY WERE PORTRAITS OF THE VENEUR FAMILY.
NOW, OF COURSE, I WELL KNOW THE REASON FOR THE STRANGE SCRATCHES ON THE PAINTINGS, BUT THEN...
...THEN, I WAS BUT A NAIVE MIDWESTERN BOY.
SEBAUD TOLD ME THAT BARSAC, LIKE MYSELF, WAS AN AUTHOR. AS I HAD NEVER HEARD OF HIM, I ASKED WHAT HE HAD WRITTEN.
"MONSIEUR BARSAC DOES NOT SO MUCH WRITE AS RECORD," CHUCKLED SEBAUD, LEAVING ME TO PUZZLE HIS MEANING.
I CONFESS TO FORMING AN IMMEDIATE ANTIPATHY FOR BARSAC, ALTHOUGH HIS INVITATION TO ENTER WAS PERFECTLY CONGENIAL.
SEBAUD, HE CURTLY DISMISSED.

OUR CONVERSATION REMAINED ON A FORMAL LEVEL. HE SPOUTED SEVERAL BANALITIES ABOUT HAVING HIMSELF ONCE BEEN A YOUNG, STARVING WRITER.
THERE WAS A FAINT, FETID SMELL TO HIS APARTMENT, WHICH REMINDED ME OF THE OFFICE OF MR. CHRISTIAN, OUR TOWN'S UNDERTAKER. YET, EVERYTHING APPEARED WELL POLISHED AND CLEAN.
I NO LONGER RECALL WHAT I SAID, BUT MY CREDENTIALS MUST HAVE SATISFIED HIM...
...FOR HE OFFERED ME A SMALL STUDIO ON THE TOP FLOOR.
HE LED ME UP TO THE THIRD FLOOR, TOWARDS ONE OF THOSE NARROW SERVICE STAIRWAY THE FRENCH CALL L'ESCALIER DE LA BONNE-- THE MAID'S STAIRS.
I COULDN'T GET THAT SMELL OUT OF MY NOSTRILS.
AND THEN, IN THAT CONFINED SPACE, I REALIZED FROM WHERE IT CAME.
HIM!
BARSAC EXPLAINED THE PENSION'S RULES, WHICH WERE FEW: DINNER AT EIGHT, NO OVERNIGHT GUESTS.
AND, DUE TO THE NATURE OF THE TRUST, THERE WAS AN OBLIGATION TO PRODUCE ART WHILE LIVING ON THE PREMISES.
I BEGAN TO REASSURE HIM THAT I HAD EVERY INTENTION OF BECOMING A FAMOUS POET...
...BUT HE TOLD ME NOT TO CONCERN MYSELF WITH THAT. APPARENTLY, NO ONE ELSE DID.
AFTER THE DARK CORRIDOR, THE COZY LITTLE STUDIO FELT LIKE HEAVEN. BESIDES, IT WAS FREE. WHAT ELSE WOULD YOU HAVE DONE?
I TOOK IT.

TRADITION AT THE *AEMBION VENEUR* REQUIRED FORMAL ATTIRE TO BE WORN AT DINNER, WHICH WAS HELD IN THE GREAT *SALLE A MANGER*-- THE DINING ROOM.
THERE, BARSAC INTRODUCED ME TO THE OTHER ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE.

I THOUGHT I DETECTED A NOTE OF CONTEMPT IN HIS VOICE AS HE MADE THE PRESENTATION.

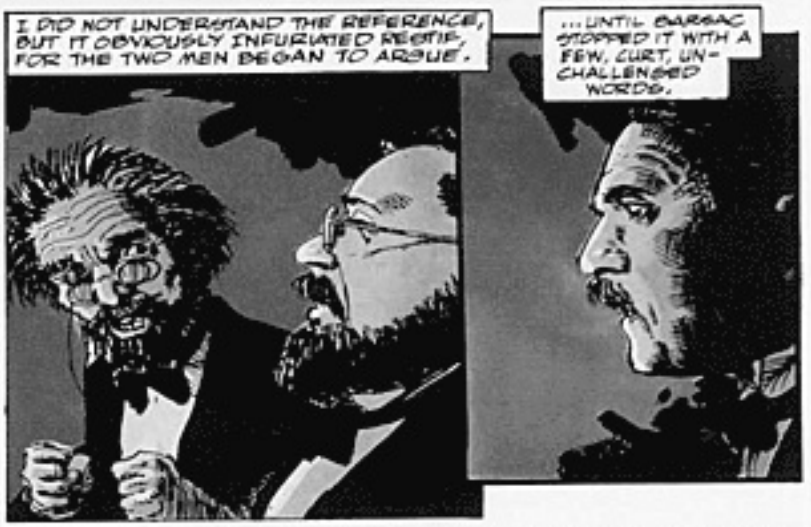
LEGRAND, A STOUT, VITAL PAINTER...
...HEARTILY CHEWING ON MEAT THAT LOOKED DISGUSTINGLY RARE.

CURVAL, A BLONDE, WAIF-LIKE SCULPTRESS, WHO SEEMED COLD...
...AND REMOTE, AS SHE ATE WITHOUT PASSION.

MATHIEU, AN OLD MUSICIAN, WHOSE EYES WERE GLAZED AND WHO MUTTERED TO HIMSELF...

AND FINALLY, *RESTIF*...
...AN ENGINEER WHOSE PASSION WAS AUTOMATA AND CLOCK-WORK TOYS.

IT WAS HE WHO FIRST BROKE THE STRAINED SILENCE, OFFERING TO SHOW ME HIS WONDROUS SINGING BIRDS.
"WHOSE BIRDS? YOURS--OR LEMARCHAND'S?" INTERRUPTED LEGRAND SARCASTICALLY.


I DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE REFERENCE, BUT IT OBVIOUSLY INFURIATED RESTIF, FOR THE TWO MEN BEGAN TO ARGUE.
...UNTIL BARSAC STOPPED IT WITH A FEW, CURT, UNCHALLENGED WORDS.

THAT WAS WHEN MLLE. CURVAL COMPLAINED TO SEBALD ABOUT HER MEAT.
SO HE WAS NOT ONLY CONCIERGE AND BUTLER, BUT COOK AS WELL. I THOUGHT IT INTERESTING.

"WE STILL WHIP DOGS IN THIS HOUSE," SAID BARSAC, TO NO ONE IN PARTICULAR.
BUT SOMEHOW, WE ALL KNEW WHOM HE MEANT.

NEVER BEFORE HAD I SEEN SUCH PURE HATRED RADIATE FROM A MAN AS I SAW FROM SEBALD THAT NIGHT.

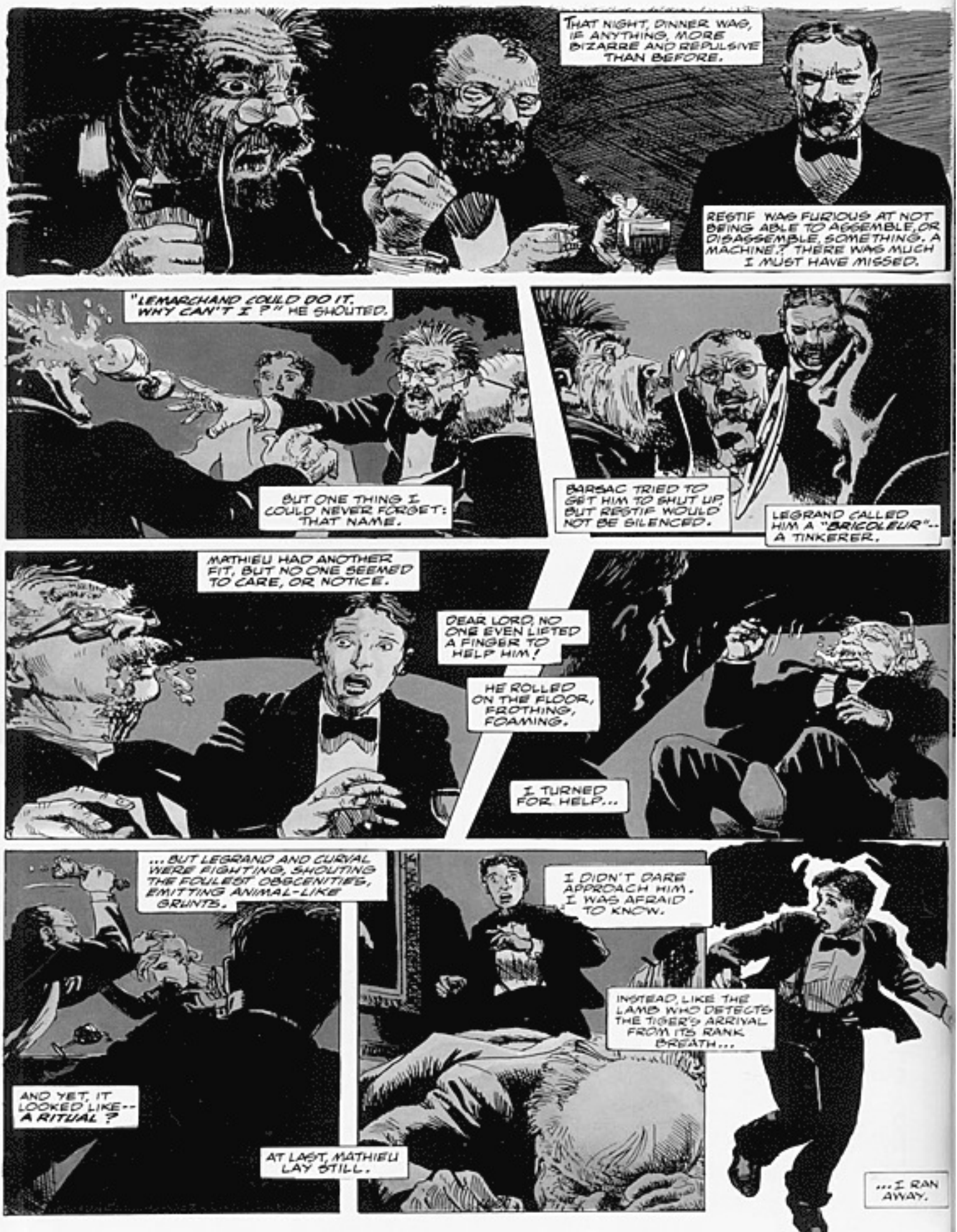
WHEN WE REACHED THE CONSOMMÉ, I ASKED MLLE. CURVAL ABOUT HER SCULPTURES, BUT ELICITED VERY LITTLE RESPONSE.
NO ONE APPEARED INTERESTED IN DISCUSSING THEIR WORK, EXCEPT FOR LEGRAND, WHO MADE ANOTHER OF HIS CRYPTICALLY SARCASTIC REMARKS...
"OH, BUT WE'RE ALL QUITE FAMOUS IN CERTAIN QUARTERS", HE SAID WITH AN ANNOYING CHUCKLE.
THAT'S WHEN BARSAC TOLD HIM HE HAD ENOUGH WINE.
SUDDENLY, SOMETHING SEEMED TO GRIP MATHIEU.
HE BEGAN SHAKING VIOLENTLY, SPEWING SOUP EVERYWHERE.
PETIT MAL, I THOUGHT. AN EPILEPTIC FIT.
HE BABBLED INCOHERENTLY...
...ABOUT A PLATE OF DOVES' HEADS.
BARSAC REMARKED THAT MATHIEU HAD BEEN WORKING TOO HARD LATELY AND APOLOGIZED ON HIS BEHALF.
I CAUGHT LEGRAND SHAKING HIS HEAD IN BEMUSED TOLERANCE, THE WAY A TEACHER WOULD AT A STUDENT'S PRANK.
SEBAUD ENTERED AND DRAGGED THE POOR WRETCH FROM THE ROOM.
PERHAPS THEY ARE PLAYING TRICKS WITH MY MEMORY, AND NONE OF THIS HAPPENED. BUT THAT IS HOW I RECALL MY FIRST DINNER AT THE PENSION VENEUR.

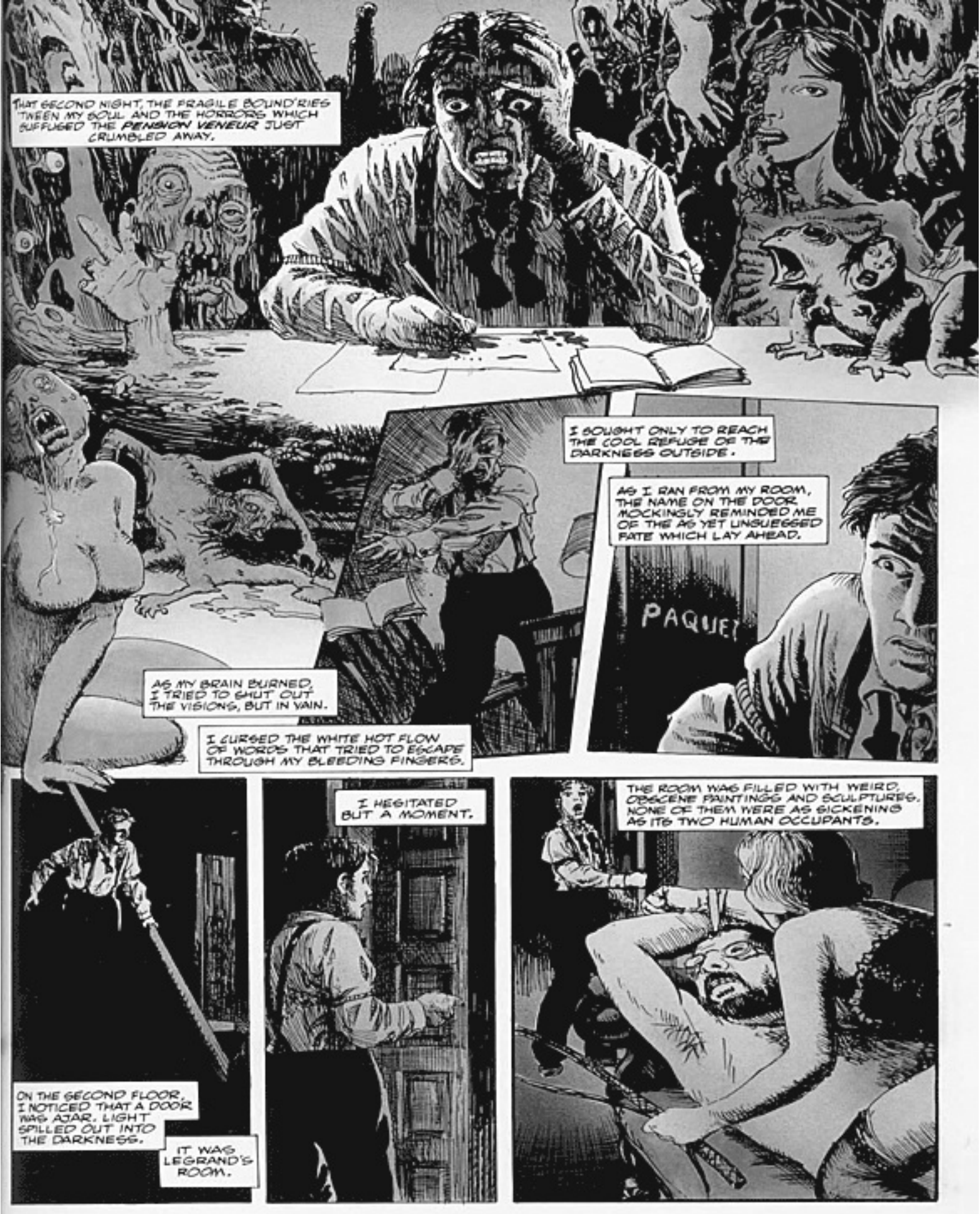
THAT FIRST NIGHT, AS I WORKED ON A NEW POEM, I DOZED OFF AND BEHELD MONSTROUS VISIONS SUCH AS I HAD NEVER SEEN BEFORE.
COULD THESE HAVE BEEN THE ANGELS COCTEAU HAD ADVISED ME TO DISTURB?
I WOKE UP AND IMMEDIATELY BEGAN COMMITTING THESE IMAGES TO PAPER, ENGAGING IN WHAT THE SURREALISTS CALLED AUTOMATIC WRITING.
MY NERVES STILL TINGLED, AND SUCH ACTION PROVED EXCRUCIATINGLY PAINFUL, YET I PERSEVERED.
...AND AWOKE.
IT WAS YET ANOTHER DREAM. MY FINGERS WERE UNHARMED.
SLOWLY, BLOOD BEGAN TO SEEP FROM BENEATH MY FINGERNAILS.
FINALLY, I COULD STAND IT NO LONGER. I SCREAMED...
...BUT FRESH BLOOD STAINED MY NOTE-BOOK.
THEN, I HEARD ANOTHER SCREAM.
WAS I STILL DREAMING?
AS I REACHED THE DOOR, I STOPPED, FOR IN THE PALLID LIGHT, SOMETHING HAD SUDDENLY CAUGHT MY EYE.
A NAME WAS SCRATCHED INTO THE FRAME...
PAQUET
THE TAO SAYS: "A MAN DREAMS THAT HE IS A BUTTERFLY. WHEN HE AWAKES, HE IS NOT SURE IF HE IS A MAN WHO DREAMED HE WAS A BUTTERFLY, OR A BUTTERFLY WHO DREAMS HE IS A MAN."
AND THAT BEST DESCRIBES HOW I FELT THAT FIRST NIGHT, AS SLOWLY, I SANK, BODY AND SOUL, INTO THE STYGIAN DEPTHS OF THE PENSION VENEUR.

DAWN BROUGHT SMALL SUCCOR.
I HAD DECIDED I WOULD TRY TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE MYSTERIOUS PAQUET.
MY FIRST STEP WAS TO STOP BY SEBAUD'S LODGE.
HE DID NOT WELCOME MY INQUIRIES, AND INDEED APPEARED TO REBUFF THEM.
ONLY MY INSISTENCE CAUSED HIM TO RELENT, AND REVEAL THAT PAQUET WAS THE PREVIOUS OWNER OF THE STUDIO.
STILL, NO MATTER HOW HARD I TRIED, I COULD NOT EXTRACT MORE INFORMATION THAN THAT FROM HIM.
MULLING THIS, I DECIDED TO ASK BARSAC.
HOWEVER, MY KNOCK YIELDED NO ANSWER.
DID HE IGNORE ME, OR DID HE JUST SLEEP SOUNDLY, I NEVER KNEW.
THEN, I NOTICED THAT THE NEXT DOOR OVER WAS AJAR. IT WAS RESTIF'S APARTMENT.
ALREADY, UNCONSCIOUS FEARS BURROWED THROUGH MY SUBCONSCIOUS, CAUSING ME TO BECOME SUSPICIOUS...
...OTHERWISE, WHAT COULD HAVE POSSESSED ME TO ENTER IT UNINVITED?
WAS IT OIL, GREASE, OR SOME KIND OF MONSTROUS ICHOR THAT OOZED FROM THE SPILLED GUTS OF RESTIF'S MECHANICAL CREATIONS?
THE WHIRR OF THE COGS DRONED ON, IN AN ENDLESS MOCKERY OF LIFE. AND THERE, IN THE CENTER OF IT ALL...

HOW DOES A YOUNG BIRD REACT TO ITS FIRST SNAKE?
CAN OUR SOULS RECOGNIZE THINGS OUR EYES HAVE NEVER BEHELD?
I APPROACHED THE THING, AND NEVER SAW RESTIF COME IN BEHIND ME.
WORDLESSLY, HE THREW A SHEET OVER IT. THERE WAS AN ODD RESPECT TO HIS GESTURE.
I MUTTERED SOME WORDS OF APOLOGY, THOUGH THESE FELL ON DEAF EARS.
BUT I HAD NOT FORGOTTEN MY ORIGINAL PURPOSE: I ASKED ABOUT PAQUET.
"HE WENT. THEY ALL WENT," HE REPLIED, DISMISSIVELY.
"THEY ALL WENT?"
THE FRIENDLY ECCENTRIC OF THE PREVIOUS NIGHT HAD TURNED INTO A WALL OF SOLID INDIFFERENCE.
I WAS ABOUT TO PRESS FOR MORE, WHEN THE SOUND OF BARSAC'S VOICE COMING FROM JUST OVER MY SHOULDER CAUSED ME TO JUMP.
WITH HIS USUAL CURT TONE, HE SENT A GRUMBLING RESTIF SCURRYING.
IT ALL SEEMED SO BANAL ON THE SURFACE.
AS TRIVIAL AS BARSAC'S EVENTUAL EXPLANATIONS ABOUT PAQUET, GIVEN LATER THAT MORNING, AS HE LED ME PAST SEBALD'S WATCHFUL EYES.
AFTER ALL THIS TIME, I HAVE FORGOTTEN WHAT THEY WERE, BUT I DO RECALL THEY WERE RENDERED UTTERLY UNBELIEVABLE BY THE OPPRESSIVE ATMOSPHERE OF THE PENSION VENEUR.

IN THE STREET, THE SUFFOCATING ENVIRONMENT OF THE PENSION SEEMED UNREAL.
I BREATHED LONG AND DEEP, CLEANING MY LUNGS OF THE MIASMIC ATMOSPHERE THAT HELD SWAY WITHIN.
I FELT A PRESSURE UPON MY BREAST, THE GENTLE NUDGE OF A CLOSE FRIEND...
MY NOTEBOOK...
LOOKING IN THE COLD, UNMERCIFUL LIGHT OF THE DAY UPON THE POEM I HAD WRITTEN THE NIGHT BEFORE, I FOUND IT BEAUTIFUL, POWERFUL...
...AND AT THE SAME TIME, FRIGHTFUL AND TERRIBLE!
COULD IT TRULY HAVE BEEN ME, THE INNOCENT AMERICAN BOY, WHO HAD WRITTEN SUCH MONSTROUS VERSE?
HAD MY NIGHT'S FEVERISH VISIONS (FOR WHAT ELSE COULD THEY BE?) INSPIRED ME TO SUCH HEIGHTS?
MY ALMOST SOMNAMBULIC MEANDERING SOMEHOW LED ME BACK TO THE EYE OF PAN...
...TO MELANIE...
...AND TO HER EVER-SO-HELPFUL EMPLOYER, MONSIEUR DANIEL.
HE RECOGNIZED ME AS I ENTERED, AND PROBABLY FELT BOUN BY CONVENTION TO AS IF I LIKED MY NEW HOME.
MY SOUR FACE MUST HAVE TOLD HIM MUCH ABOUT MY FEELINGS.
I QUITE CLEARLY RECALL MENTIONING HOW UNSATISFIED I WAS WITH BARSAC'S EXPLANATION OF PAQUET'S DISAPPEARANCE.
DANIEL ROSE TO THE DEFENSE, MAKING PREPOSTEROUS CLAIMS ABOUT BARSAC'S RESPECTABILITY...
HE HAD STARTED SPINNING A YARN...
...WHEN ANOTHER CLIENT FORCED HIM TO ABANDON ME TO MY OWN DESIGNS...
...WHICH SUITED ME JUST FINE.

THE ONE I HAD REALLY COME TO SEE STEPPED FROM BEHIND A SHELF, AND TOLD ME THAT DANIEL WAS LYING...
...WHICH EVEN THEN, I REMEMBER, CAME AS NO GREAT SURPRISE TO ME.
WHAT I DID NOT KNOW, HOWEVER, AND WHAT I LEARNED THAT DAY FROM MELANIE'S WHISPER IN MY EAR, WAS THAT...
DANIEL WAS SEBALD'S BROTHER!
IT WAS THEN THAT I UNDERSTOOD *HOW* HE HAD COME TO SEND ME TO THE *PENSION*, BUT NOT YET *WHY*.
MELANIE TOLD ME OF OTHER YOUNG, STRUGGLING ARTISTS SENT THERE BEFORE ME, BUT *NONE* HAD *NEVER* BEEN SEEN, OR HEARD FROM, AGAIN!
THAT WAS TO COME LATER.
MELANIE'S CURIOSITY, HAD MADE HER DISTRUSTFUL OF THE MYSTERIOUS *PENSION VENEUR*...
...HENCE HER EARLIER RELUCTANCE TO SEND ME THERE.
AS RESTIF HAD SAID: "*THEY ALL WENT.*"
WE AGREED TO MEET THE FOLLOWING DAY--HER DAY OFF--AT THE LUXEMBOURG GARDENS.

THAT NIGHT, DINNER WAS, IF ANYTHING, MORE BIZARRE AND REPULSIVE THAN BEFORE.
RESTIF WAS FURIOUS AT NOT BEING ABLE TO ASSEMBLE, OR DISASSEMBLE, SOMETHING. A MACHINE? THERE WAS MUCH I MUST HAVE MISSED.
"LEMARCHAND COULD DO IT, WHY CAN'T I?" HE SHOUTED.
BUT ONE THING I COULD NEVER FORGET: THAT NAME.
BARSAC TRIED TO GET HIM TO SHUT UP, BUT RESTIF WOULD NOT BE SILENCED.
LEGRAND CALLED HIM A "BRICOLEUR"-- A TINKERER.
MATHIEU HAD ANOTHER FIT, BUT NO ONE SEEMED TO CARE, OR NOTICE.
DEAR LORD, NO ONE EVEN LIFTED A FINGER TO HELP HIM!
HE ROLLED ON THE FLOOR, FROTHING, FOAMING.
I TURNED FOR HELP...
... BUT LEGRAND AND CURVAL WERE FIGHTING, SHOUTING THE FOULEST OBSCENITIES, EMITTING ANIMAL-LIKE GRUNTS.
AND YET, IT LOOKED LIKE-- A RITUAL?
AT LAST, MATHIEU LAY STILL.
I DIDN'T DARE APPROACH HIM. I WAS AFRAID TO KNOW.
INSTEAD, LIKE THE LAMB WHO DETECTS THE TIGER'S ARRIVAL FROM ITS RANK BREATH...
...I RAN AWAY.

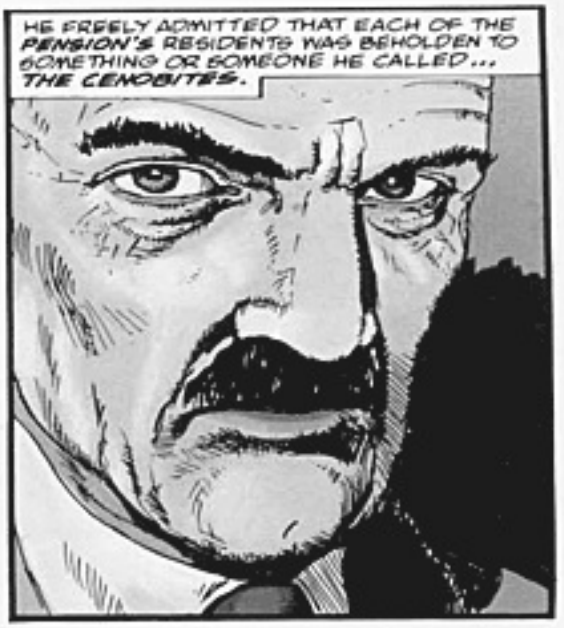

THAT SECOND NIGHT, THE FRAGILE BOUND'RIES 'TWEEN MY SOUL AND THE HORRORS WHICH SUFFUSED THE PENSION VENEUR JUST CRUMBLED AWAY.
I SOUGHT ONLY TO REACH THE COOL REFUGE OF THE DARKNESS OUTSIDE.
AS I RAN FROM MY ROOM, THE NAME ON THE DOOR MOCKINGLY REMINDED ME OF THE AS YET UNGUESSED FATE WHICH LAY AHEAD.
PAQUET
AS MY BRAIN BURNED, I TRIED TO SHUT OUT THE VISIONS, BUT IN VAIN.
I CURSED THE WHITE HOT FLOW OF WORDS THAT TRIED TO ESCAPE THROUGH MY BLEEDING FINGERS.
ON THE SECOND FLOOR, I NOTICED THAT A DOOR WAS AJAR. LIGHT SPILLED OUT INTO THE DARKNESS.
IT WAS LEGRAND'S ROOM.
I HESITATED BUT A MOMENT.
THE ROOM WAS FILLED WITH WEIRD, OBSCENE PAINTINGS AND SCULPTURES. NONE OF THEM WERE AS SICKENING AS ITS TWO HUMAN OCCUPANTS.

BARELY BOTHERING TO STOP THEIR LOATHSOME BEHAVIOR, THEY INVITED ME IN.
CURVAL EVEN DARED SUGGEST THAT I JOIN THEM. I SHRANK BACK IN TERROR.
LEGRAND CALLED ME A FOOL AND A COWARD.
HE BRAGGED THAT ALL THE PENSION'S RESIDENTS PURVEYED WORKS OF A NATURE SO FILTHY AND PERVERSE, I COULD BARELY COMPREHEND IT. THEIR CREATIONS COMMANDED HIGH PRICES FROM SECRET COLLECTORS WHOSE DEPRAVED TASTES THRIVED ON SUCH ABOMINATIONS.
HE TAUNTED ME, CALLING ME A HYPOCRITE, TURNING UP MY NOSE AT THEM, YET DRINKING FROM THE SAME SOURCE.
I RAN TO MY ROOM, THEIR FOUL, MOCKING LAUGHTER STILL RINGING IN MY EARS.
HAD I TRULY ACCEPTED THE MEANING OF HIS WORDS, I COULD STILL HAVE ESCAPED THE PENSION'S INSIDIOUS TRAP.
BUT AS I LOOKED AT MY NIGHT'S WORK, I SAW THAT, AS MORBID AND DECADENT AS IT WAS, MY POETRY HAD GAINED A LIFE AND A STRENGTH IT HAD NEVER HAD BEFORE.
I FELT AN ELATION WHICH HORRIFIED ME MORE THAN THE POETRY ITSELF.
THE PENSION WAS NURTURING MY CREATIVITY INTO SOME GNARLED AND TWISTED SHAPES.
WHAT WAS THE COST FOR THIS NEWFOUND EXCELLENCE? WAS I BECOMING A MONSTER, LIKE THE OTHERS?
WAS THAT WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO PAQUET?

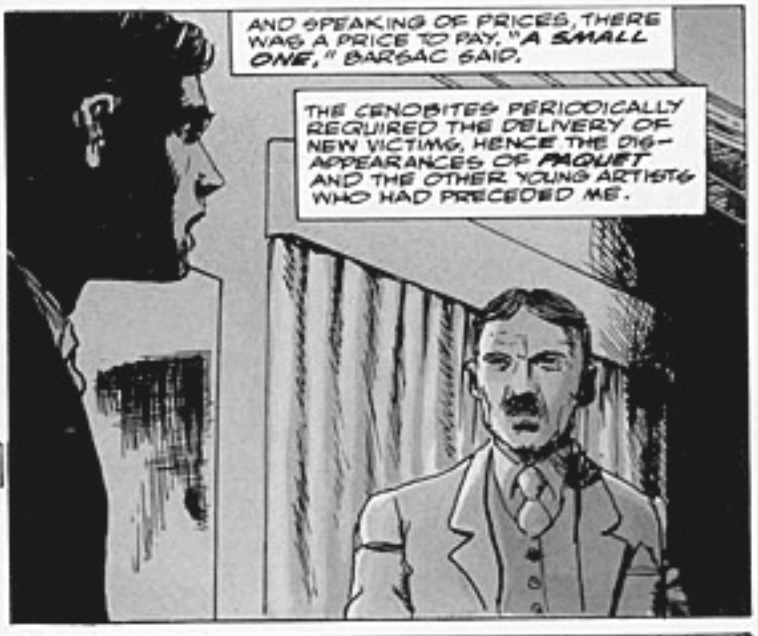
THE NEXT MORNING, I SAW A HEARSE AND TWO UNDERTAKERS OUTSIDE.
I WAS NOT THE LEAST BIT SURPRISED. DEATH SEEMED A NATURAL VISITOR TO THE PENSION VENEUR.
I ASKED BEBAUD...
...WHO REVEALED THAT MATHIEU HAD KILLED HIMSELF DURING THE NIGHT.
HE FEIGNED AN UNCTIOUS COMPASSION WHICH HE QUITE OBVIOUSLY DID NOT FEEL.
THE TWO UNDERTAKERS WERE TRADITIONAL CROQUE-MORTS--CRUNCHERS OF THE DEAD--THE COLORFUL NAME THE FRENCH GIVE TO THOSE TRAFFICKERS IN DEATH.
I OVERHEARD ONE REMARK THAT HE'D NEVER SEEN ANYONE DO THEMSELVES IN SUCH A HORRIBLE WAY.
THE OTHER REPLIED ABOUT A CASE HE'D ONCE SEEN. THEY GHOULISHLY BEGAN TO COMPARE NOTES.
BARBAC AND LEGRAND STOOD NEARBY, WATCHING THE PROCEEDINGS...
AS I WALKED PAST THEM, I CAUGHT A SHRED OF THEIR CONVERSATION...
"I THOUGHT HE'D NEVER GO!" BARBAC SAID.

I MET MELANIE IN THE LUXEMBOURG GARDENS.
THE BRIGHT, SUNNY AFTERNOON MADE THE HORRORS OF THE PENSION LOOK EVEN MORE UNREAL.
MELANIE TOLD ME THE PENSION VENEUR USED TO BELONG TO A MAN NAMED LEMARCHAND. A STRANGE MAKER OF PUZZLE BOXES AND OTHER WEIRD MECHANICAL WONDERS, SOMEONE WITH A DECIDEDLY UNSAVORY REPUTATION.
ONE DAY, HE DISAPPEARED. NO ONE KNEW HOW, WHY OR WHERE.
A HOUSE OF DEATH, A HOUSE OF PAIN.
FOR ALL SHE KNEW, LEMARCHAND MIGHT HAVE BEEN THE FOUNDER OF THE TRUST THAT KEPT THE PENSION GOING.
THE HOUSE ITSELF WAS BUILT UPON THE CATACOMBS; BONE POWDER WAS MIXED INTO ITS VERY MORTAR, BLOOD USED IN ITS CEMENT.
SHE URGED ME NOT TO RETURN. I FELT COMPELLED TO GO.
I KNEW THEN, THAT IF I REMAINED AT THE PENSION, I COULD BECOME THE BEST POET WHO HAD EVER LIVED.
THAT WAS MY CALLING. I SUPPOSE IT COULD BE SAID THAT IT WAS IN MY BLOOD.
I NEVER SAW HER AGAIN, BUT I LIKE TO THINK THAT SHE CRIED AS I RAN BACK TO THE PENSION IN THE RAPIDLY FALLING DUSK.

LATER, I CONFRONTED BARSAC IN HIS APARTMENT.
HE WAS EXPECTING THE ENCOUNTER. IN HIS EYES, I WAS A RESOURCEFUL YOUNG MAN, BUT A FOOL, NONETHELESS.


HE FREELY ADMITTED THAT EACH OF THE PENSION'S RESIDENTS WAS BEHOLDEN TO SOMETHING OR SOMEONE HE CALLED... THE CENOBITES.

THEY WISHED US ALL TO PRODUCE WORK OF SO HORRIFYING A NATURE THAT FEW BUT THOSE HELLISH CREATURES COULD EVEN MANAGE TO STAND ITS SIGHT.
IN EXCHANGE, THEY ALLOWED THE ARTISTS TO SELL SOME OF THE LESSER PIECES ON THAT ABOMINABLE BLACK MARKET, WHERE IT STILL FETCHED INCREDIBLE PRICES.


AND SPEAKING OF PRICES, THERE WAS A PRICE TO PAY. "A SMALL ONE," BARSAC SAID.
THE CENOBITES PERIODICALLY REQUIRED THE DELIVERY OF NEW VICTIMS, HENCE THE DISAPPEARANCES OF PAQUET AND THE OTHER YOUNG ARTISTS WHO HAD PRECEDED ME.

THE TIME HAD COME TO HONOR THE AGE-OLD BARGAIN: SUMMON THE CENOBITES TO TAKE POSSESSION OF THEIR NEW OFFERING.

I TRIED TO LEAP AT BARSAC, BUT LEGRAND AND REGTIE SUDDENLY SEIZED ME.
I FELT THE SAME WRETCHED HELPLESSNESS WHICH MUST BE FELT BY THE MAN ON THE GUILLOTINE, AS HE WAITS FOR THE BLADE TO FALL.

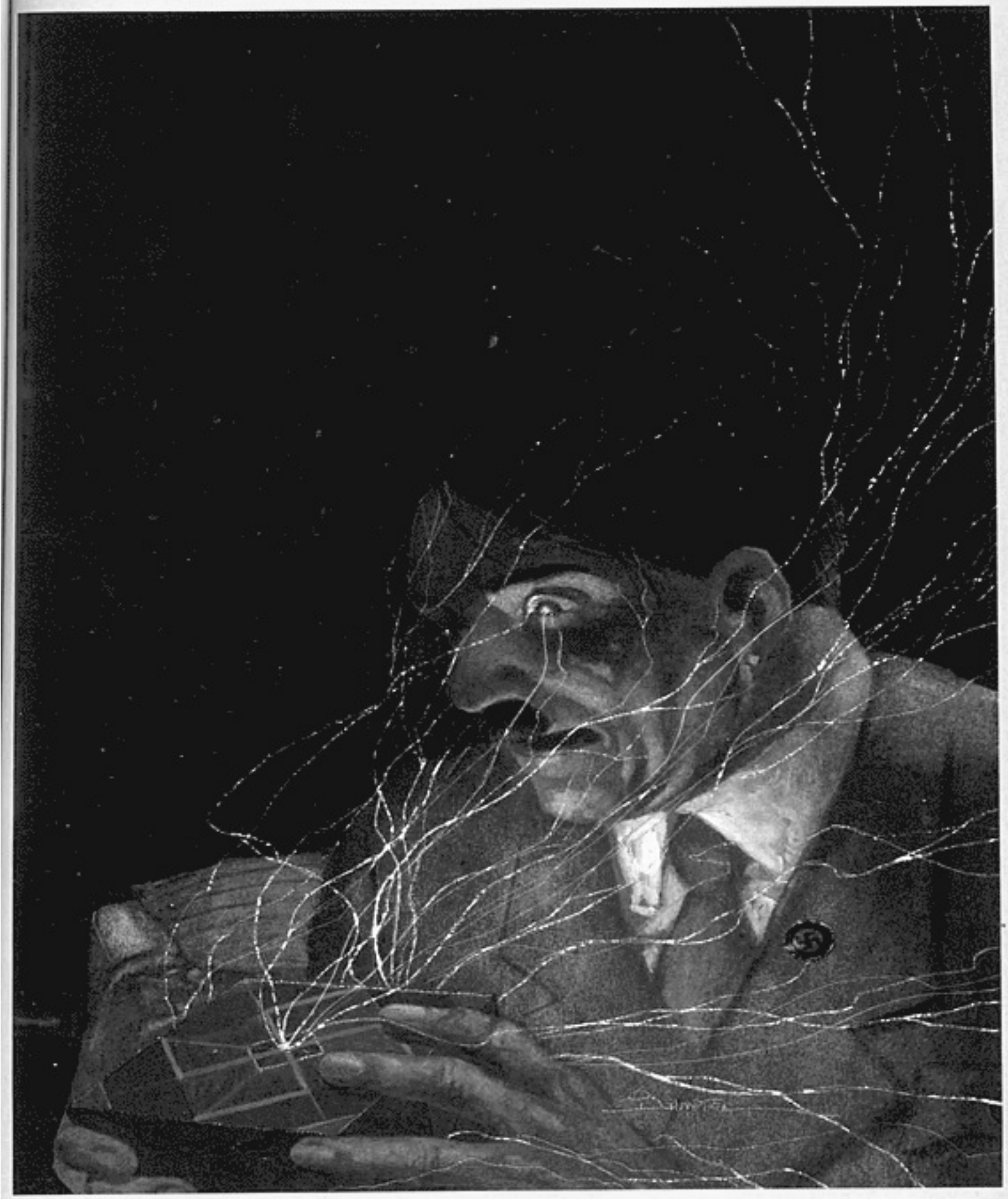
LOCKED UP IN MY STUDIO, I SCRATCHED MY NAME ON THE DOOR, AS A FUTILE WARNING TO THOSE WHO WOULD FOLLOW ME.
SUDDENLY, I HEARD A VOICE, SEBAUD'S.
HE SAID I DID NOT HAVE TO SHARE IN THE FATE OF THE OTHERS.
I WAS DIFFERENT.
SOMEHOW, HE HAD FOUND MY NOTEBOOK AND READ MY POEMS. I HAD BECOME THE TROUBADOUR OF BLOOD AND PAIN.
BARSAC HAD ERRED BY ALLOWING ME TO JOIN THE PENSION.
"IN YOUR HEART, YOU KNOW WHAT YOU MUST DO", HE SAID.
THEN, HE LEFT, BUT HE HAD BEEN RIGHT.
IN MY HEART, I KNEW WHAT I MUST DO.
GO HELP ME GO! I KNEW!

ACTING ON BARSAC'S REQUEST, RESTIF ACTIVATED THE MYSTERIOUS DEVICE.
LEMARCHAND'S CURSED MACHINE ACCOMPLISHED ITS WONDROUS, DEVILISH WORK.
THE CENOBITES ARRIVED.
THEY BROUGHT A FITFUL PHOSPHORESCENCE, LIKE THE GLOW OF DEEP-SEA LIFE, AND A SMELL OF VANILLA, WHICH BARELY HID THE STENCH BENEATH.
I WELCOMED THEM WITH AN IMPASSIONED SPEECH.
I NO LONGER DAMNED THE FLOW OF BAD POETRY WHICH WELLED WITHIN ME. OH, COCTEAU, IF YOU COULD HAVE HEARD ME THEN!
NOT ONLY DID I DISTURB YOUR PRECIOUS ANGELS, BUT I SHREDDED THEIR SILKEN WINGS AND DRANK THEIR HEAVENLY ICHOR.
I BECAME THE CENOBITES' PERFECT INSTRUMENT, GLORIFYING THE ONLY FEELINGS WHICH THEY COULD STILL EXPERIENCE.
I PROVED I COULD SERVE THEM BETTER THAN BARSAC, A DRIED-OUT HUSK; LIKE MATHIEU, AN EMPTY VESSEL, FIT ONLY TO BE DISCARDED.

THE CENOBITES STOPPED.
BUT I SHOWED THEM HOW TO TRANSMUTE PAIN INTO BEAUTY...
BARSAC BEGAN TO RANT. HE SHOUTED AT THEM TO TAKE ME.
...AND TO THIS, EVEN THE MIGHTY CENOBITES PAUSED TO LISTEN.
I KNEW THEN THAT I HAD WON.
THEY MOVED TOWARDS BARSAC. TERRIFIED, HE UTTERED A SMALL ANIMAL WHINE, THEN TURNED AND FLED.
LEGRAND AND CURVAL MIGHT AS WELL HAVE BEEN MADE OF STONE, FOR THEY MOVED NOT AN INCH TO AID HIM.
NOT SO GEBAUD, WHO REMEMBERED OLD ACCOUNTS YET TO BE SETTLED!
MY LAST MEMORY OF THAT FATEFUL NIGHT WAS OF THE CENOBITES DRAGGING BARSAC AWAY TO WHATEVER FATE I HAD UNDOUBTEDLY INVOKED FOR HIM IN MY DEMENTED VERSES.
THEN, MERCIFULLY, I LOST CONSCIOUSNESS.

THE MORNING SUN WOKE ME, AND FOUND ME IN MY BED.
FLEETINGLY, I PRAYED IT HAD ALL BEEN A NIGHTMARE, YET KNEW PERFECTLY WELL THE HORRIBLE TRUTH.
SEBALD WELCOMED ME, AND TOLD ME BARSAC'S APARTMENT WOULD BE READY FOR ME TO MOVE INTO BY EARLY THAT EVENING.
I TRIED TO EXPLAIN I HAD ONLY FOLLOWED HIS MAD ADVICE TO SAVE MY LIFE. I DID NOT WANT TO BECOME LIKE BARSAC.
BUT HE SAID I HAD NO CHOICE. IT WAS TO BE MY DESTINY.
I FLED TO THE STREETS TO ESCAPE HIS MONSTROUS HONESTY.
HE YELLED AFTER ME-- "DINNER AT EIGHT, YOUNG MASTER!"
I RAN TOWARDS THE ONE AND ONLY PERSON WHOM I THOUGHT COULD STILL SAVE ME FROM THAT ABYSS...
MELANIE!
DANIEL WAS ALONE.
I ASKED ABOUT HER.
HE THREW HIS ARMS UP IN THE AIR IN A TYPICAL GALLIC SHRUG.
"IT IS A BIG MALHEUR, MONSIEUR!" HE SAID. AN UNFORTUNATE EVENT.
SHE HAD DIED THAT MORNING, STABBED BY A MUGGER, AN INNOCENT VICTIM OF THE CITY'S MADNESS.
THE REST OF HIS SANCTIMONIOUS CLICHES WERE DROWNED OUT BY THE SOUND OF THE BRASS GATES OF HELL CLOSING UPON MY COLD HEART.

THEY CALLED THEM THE CRAZY YEARS.
BUT THE YEAR BEFORE, IN MUNICH, AN OBSCURE GERMAN POLITICAL PARTY HAD HELD ITS FIRST CONGRESS-- THE NAZI PARTY...
IN THE SOVIET UNION, JOSEPH STALIN HAD BECOME GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY...
A QUIET, GERMAN SCIENTIST NAMED ALBERT EINSTEIN WAS PRESENTLY MULLING THOUGHTS THAT WOULD SOMEDAY EXPLODE THE LIGHT OF A THOUSAND SUNS OVER JAPAN...
AND I, NO LONGER NAIVE AND INNOCENT, I...
I MOVED INTO THE PENSION VENEUR.
FIN



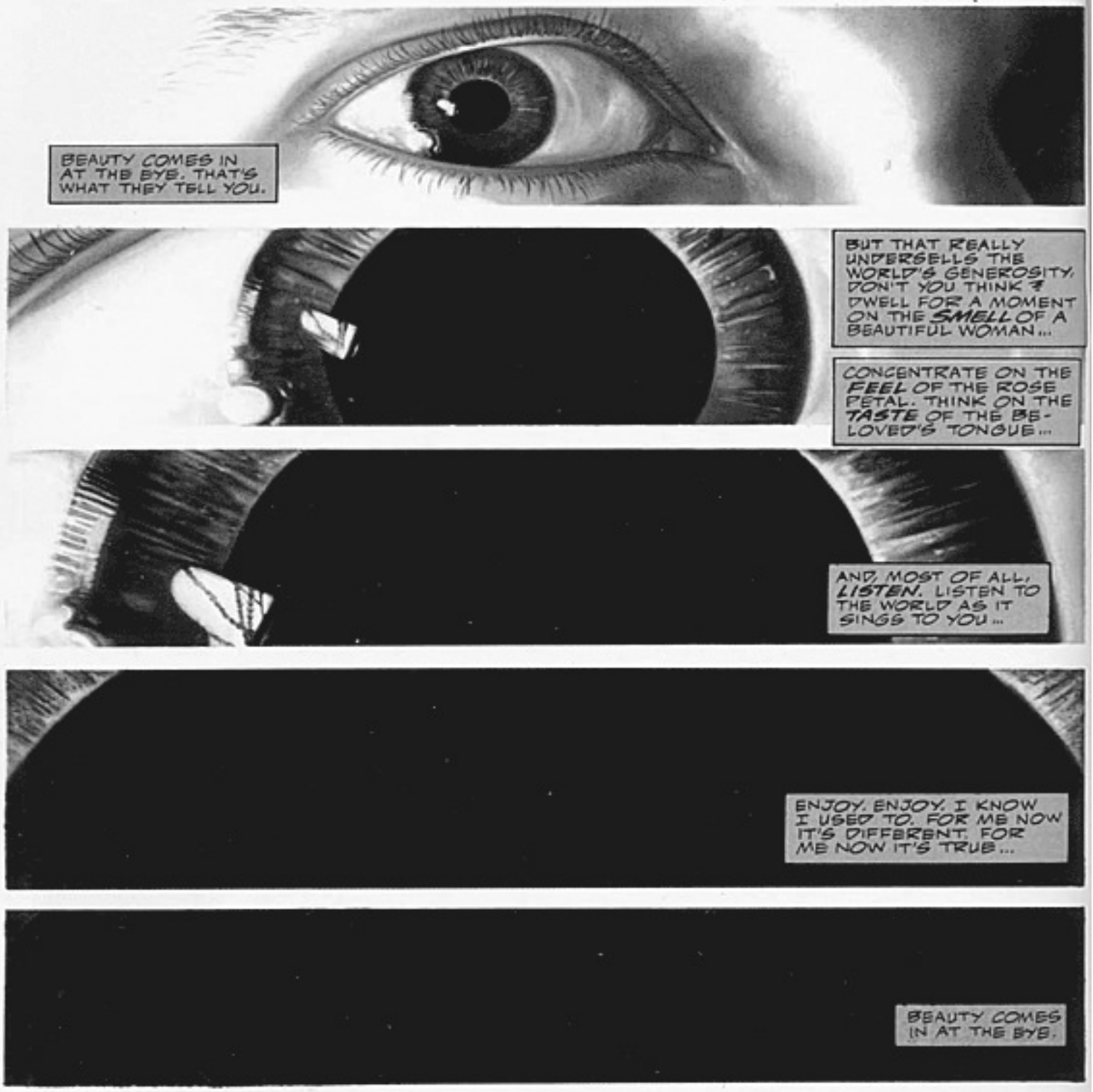
9:SONGS OF METAL AND FLESH

molto agitato

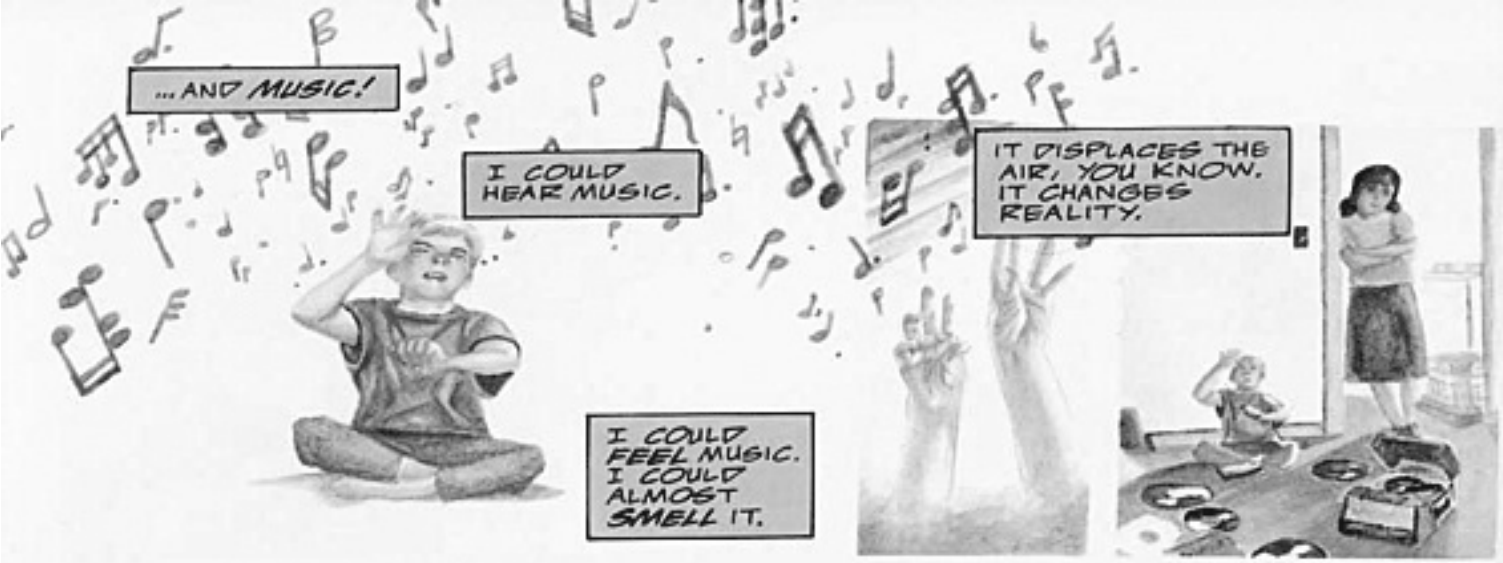
PETER AKINS
WRITER

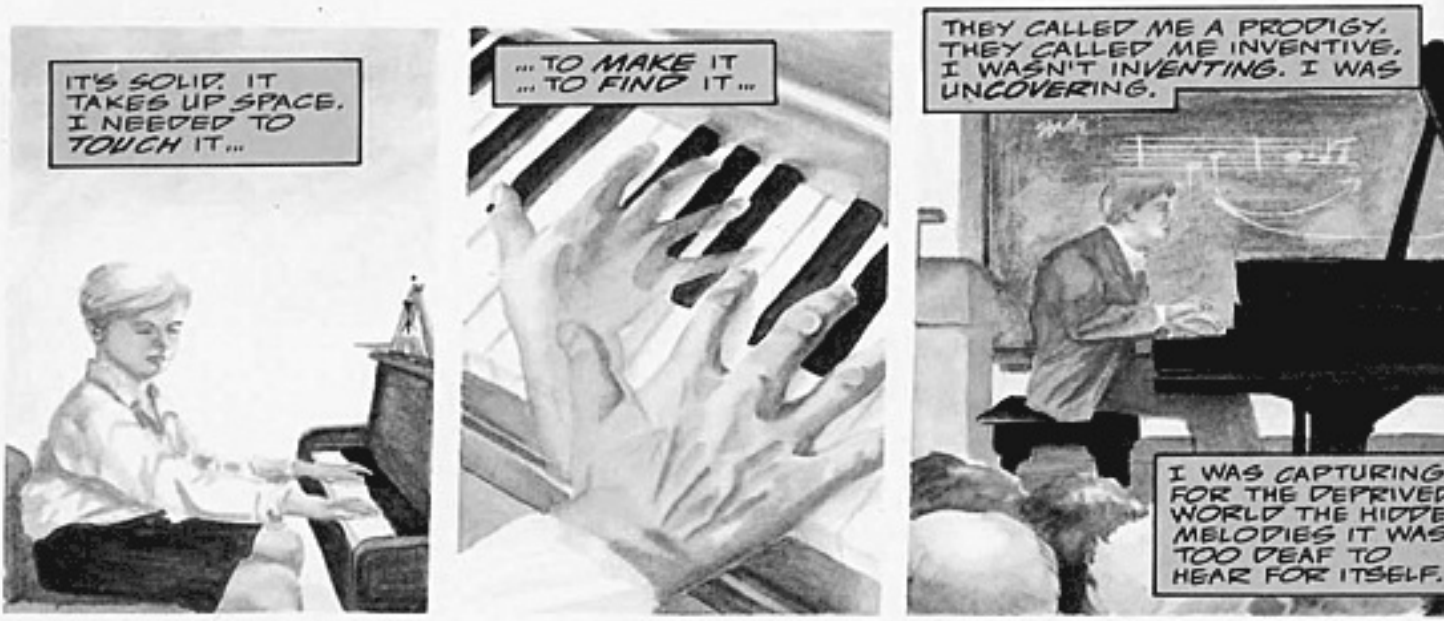
DAVE DORMAN & LUKENE HAINES
ARTISTS

PHIL FELIX
LETTERER

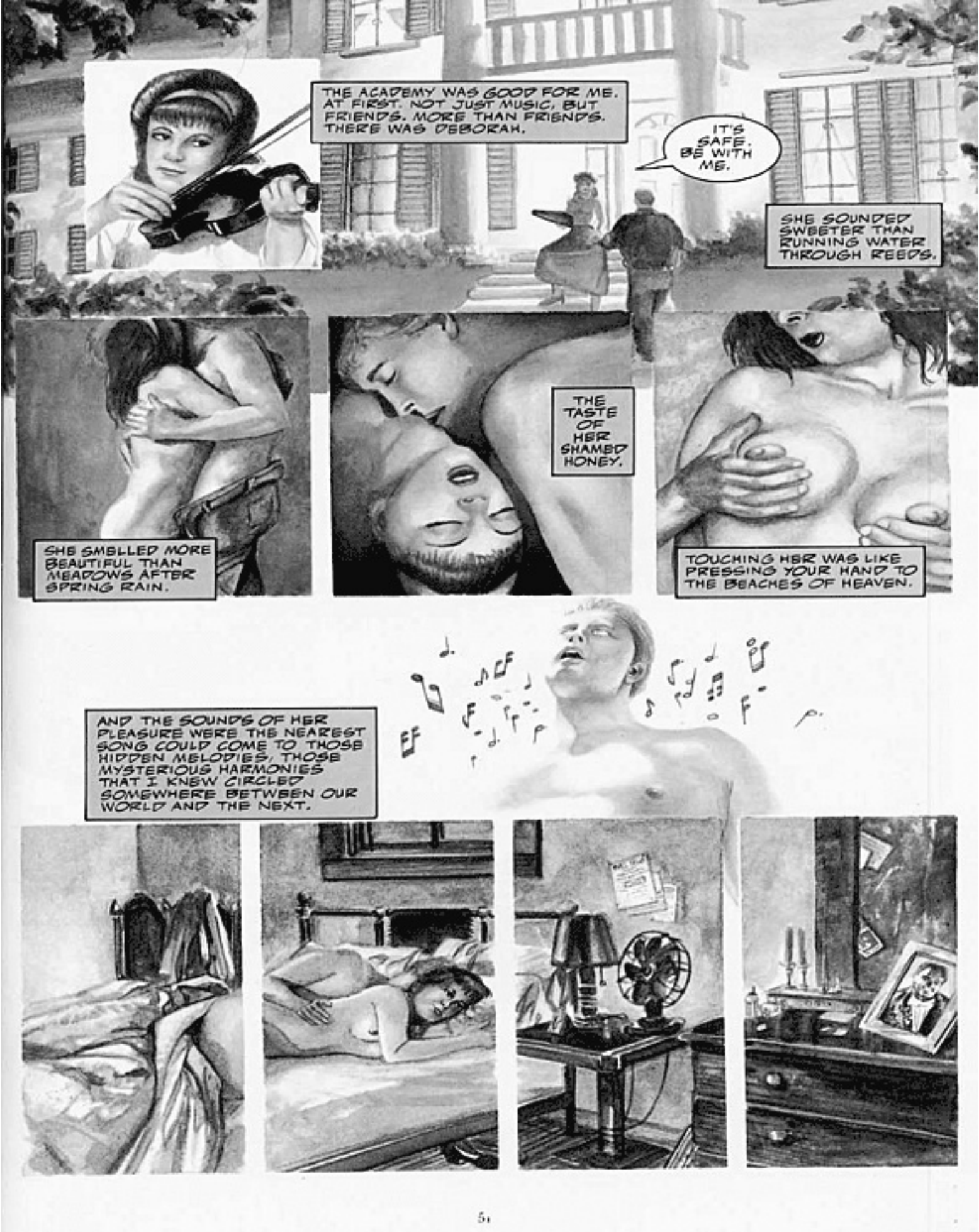

BEAUTY COMES IN AT THE BYE. THAT'S WHAT THEY TELL YOU.
BUT THAT REALLY UNDERSELLS THE WORLD'S GENEROSITY. DON'T YOU THINK? DWELL FOR A MOMENT ON THE SMELL OF A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN...
CONCENTRATE ON THE FEEL OF THE ROSE PETAL. THINK ON THE TASTE OF THE BELOVED'S TONGUE...
AND, MOST OF ALL, LISTEN. LISTEN TO THE WORLD AS IT SINGS TO YOU...
ENJOY. ENJOY. I KNOW I USED TO. FOR ME NOW IT'S DIFFERENT. FOR ME NOW IT'S TRUE...
BEAUTY COMES IN AT THE BYE.

WHICH IS PRETTY IRONIC, GIVEN MY HISTORY...
THIRTY YEARS AGO...
I'M SORRY, MRS. MARLOWE. THERE'S NO CHANGE.
NO CHANGE AT ALL. NOR IS THERE LIKELY TO BE.
YOUR SON... JASON... HE'S BLIND, MRS. MARLOWE. AND HE'LL BE BLIND FOR THE REST OF HIS LIFE.
BIG NEWS.
BUT, YOU KNOW, HIS OTHER SENSES WILL COMPENSATE. HAVE PROBABLY ALREADY BEGUN TO...
HE DIDN'T KNOW THE HALF OF IT. I WAS HARDLY EVEN LISTENING. I WAS BUSY SUCKING IN THE SENSUAL DETAILS OF THE WORLD.
I COULD HEAR THE RUSTLE OF THEIR UNDERWEAR AS THEY SPOKE.
I COULD SMELL THE UNDER-CURRENT OF AROUSAL IN HIS RESPONSE TO MY MOTHER...
TINY RUSTLES OF PAPER AND GLASS AS BREEZES UNDETECTABLE BY MOST ENTERED HIS ROOM THROUGH GAPS IN HIS GLAZIER'S EFFICIENCY.
SUBTLE TINGLES ON MY TONGUE AS TRACES OF HIS CHEMICALS MATED WITH MY TASTE-BUDS.
...COULD HEAR THE CONTRACTIONS IN HIS THROAT AS HE TRIED TO GULP IT INTO HIDING, COULD ALMOST FEEL THE HEAT FROM HIS FLUSHING CHEEKS.
IT'S JUST— IT'S JUST THAT IT HURTS, WHEN I THINK OF ALL HE'LL MISS, WHEN I THINK OF ALL HE'S MISSING...
WHAT WAS I MISSING? REDUNDANT ILLUSTRATIONS OF THINGS I ALREADY KNEW.
I HAD ALL I NEEDED.
SMELL. SOUND. TOUCH. TASTE.


...AND MUSIC!
I COULD HEAR MUSIC.
I COULD FEEL MUSIC. I COULD ALMOST SMELL IT.
IT DISPLACES THE AIR, YOU KNOW. IT CHANGES REALITY.


IT'S SOLID. IT TAKES UP SPACE. I NEEDED TO TOUCH IT...
...TO MAKE IT ...TO FIND IT...
THEY CALLED ME A PRODIGY. THEY CALLED ME INVENTIVE. I WASN'T INVENTING. I WAS UNCOVERING.
I WAS CAPTURING FOR THE DEPRIVED WORLD THE HIDDEN MELODIES IT WAS TOO DEAF TO HEAR FOR ITSELF.

AND THE MORE I FOUND, THE MORE I KNEW WAS STILL HIDDEN. THE MORE I SENSED A VAST SONIC TRUTH WAITING TO BE REVEALED.
AND I TRUST NONE OF US NEED ANY MORE CONVINCING OF WHY JASON MARLOWE HAS BEEN ACCEPTED INTO OUR SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME...
I DIDN'T LISTEN TO THE FLANNEL. I DIDN'T NEED IT. HE WAS RIGHT. BUT THE GHOSTS OF THE NOTES DYING AROUND ME WERE INFINITELY MORE INTERESTING.


THE ACADEMY WAS GOOD FOR ME. AT FIRST. NOT JUST MUSIC, BUT FRIENDS. MORE THAN FRIENDS. THERE WAS DEBORAH.
IT'S SAFE. BE WITH ME.
SHE SOUNDED SWEETER THAN RUNNING WATER THROUGH REEDS.
SHE SMELLED MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN MEADOWS AFTER SPRING RAIN.
THE TASTE OF HER SHAMED HONEY.
TOUCHING HER WAS LIKE PRESSING YOUR HAND TO THE BEACHES OF HEAVEN.
AND THE SOUNDS OF HER PLEASURE WERE THE NEAREST SONG COULD COME TO THOSE HIDDEN MELODIES, THOSE MYSTERIOUS HARMONIES THAT I KNEW CIRCLED SOMEWHERE BETWEEN OUR WORLD AND THE NEXT.

I LEARNED OTHER THINGS AT THE ACADEMY, TOO...
RIVALRY... JEALOUSY...
STEPHEN MIDDLETON WAS THE BEST THE ACADEMY HAD. APART FROM ME.
HIS ENVIOUS HATRED SWAM IN THE AIR AROUND HIM EACH TIME WE SPOKE, DESPITE HIS FRIENDLY WORDS.
YOU REALLY ARE SOMETHING SPECIAL, JASON. SOMETHING QUITE DIFFERENT FROM THE REST OF US.
THAT'S NONSENSE. YOU'RE GOOD.
IT'S TRUE. I AM. I'M BLOODY GOOD. BUT YOU'RE... DIFFERENT. YOU MAKE IT ALL SEEM... NATURAL. EASY.
IT IS EASY. THAT'S THE POINT. IT'S NOT ABOUT WORK, IT'S... LET ME SHOW YOU.
YOU SEE, YOU THINK OF IT AS SOMETHING YOU HAVE TO MAKE OUT OF NOTHING. NO. IT'S ALL THERE. JUST LET IT ALL OUT AND THEN CATCH WHAT YOU WANT...
JUST LET IT ALL OUT. JUST LISTEN. LISTEN AND SNATCH.
THEY THOUGHT THEY HAD A LITTLE SECRET. BUT I KNEW. I COULD HEAR THEM. I COULD SMELL THEIR CRUEL EXCITEMENT.
FASCINATING... I THINK I'M BEGINNING TO UNDER-STAND.
BUT I PLAYED ALONG.

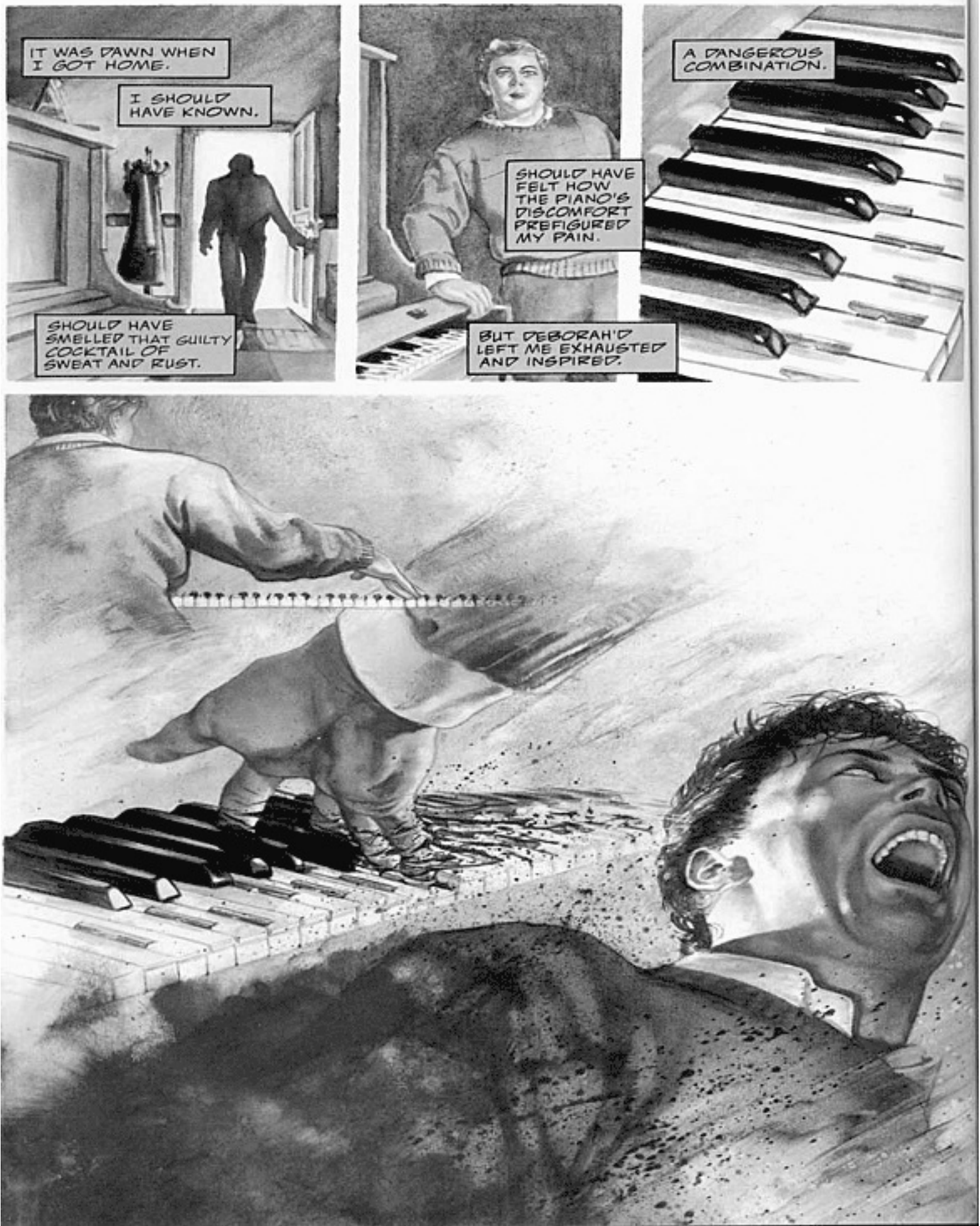
SO DID SHE.
I WANT TO SEE. I WANT THE LIGHT ON.

WAIT. I WANT TO PLAY. LET'S PLAY SOMETHING.

WE PLAYED. WHILE THE REAL GAME WENT ON ELSEWHERE. WHILE WE WERE AT HER PLACE, STEPHEN WAS AT MINE. SHE MUST HAVE GIVEN HIM THE KEY.

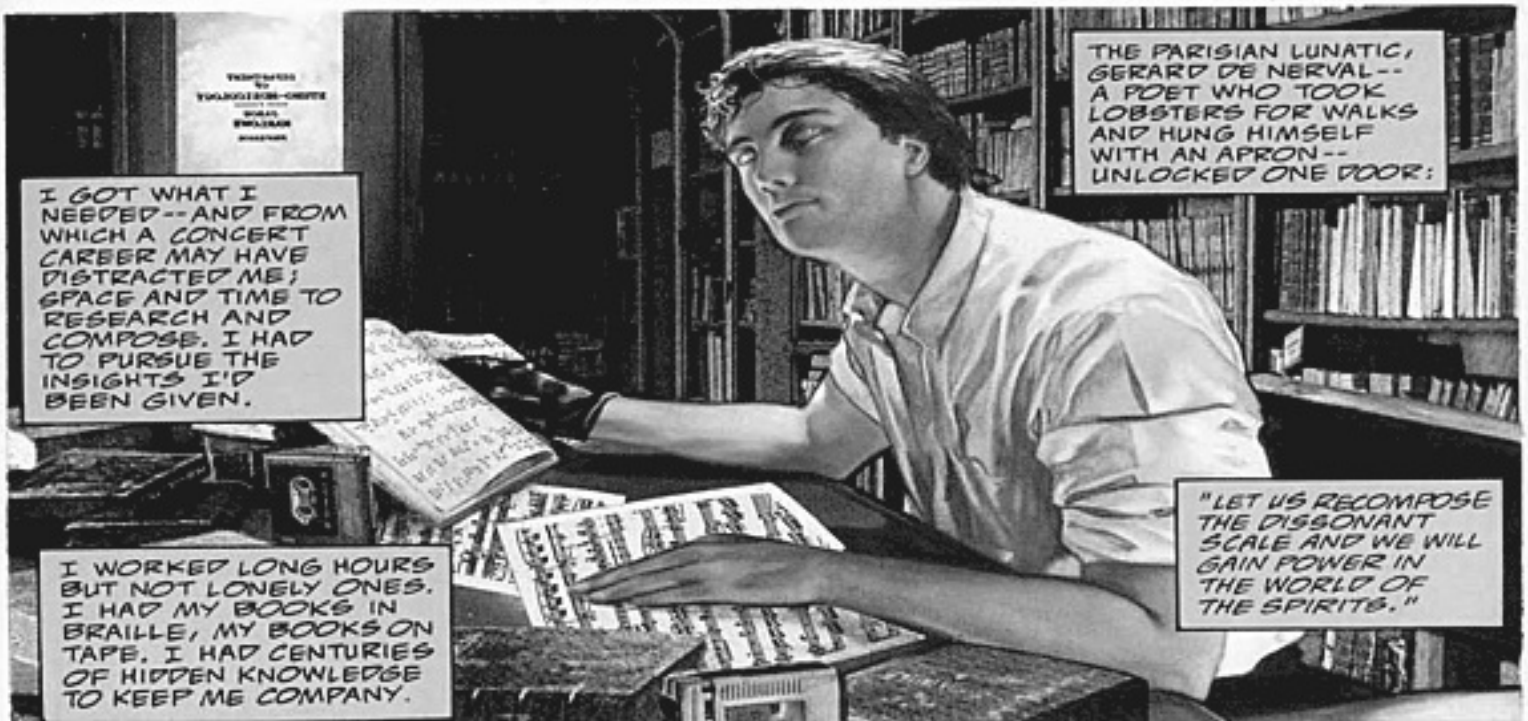
IT EXCITES YOU, DOESN'T IT? IT MAKES YOU HARD. YOU LOVE IT.

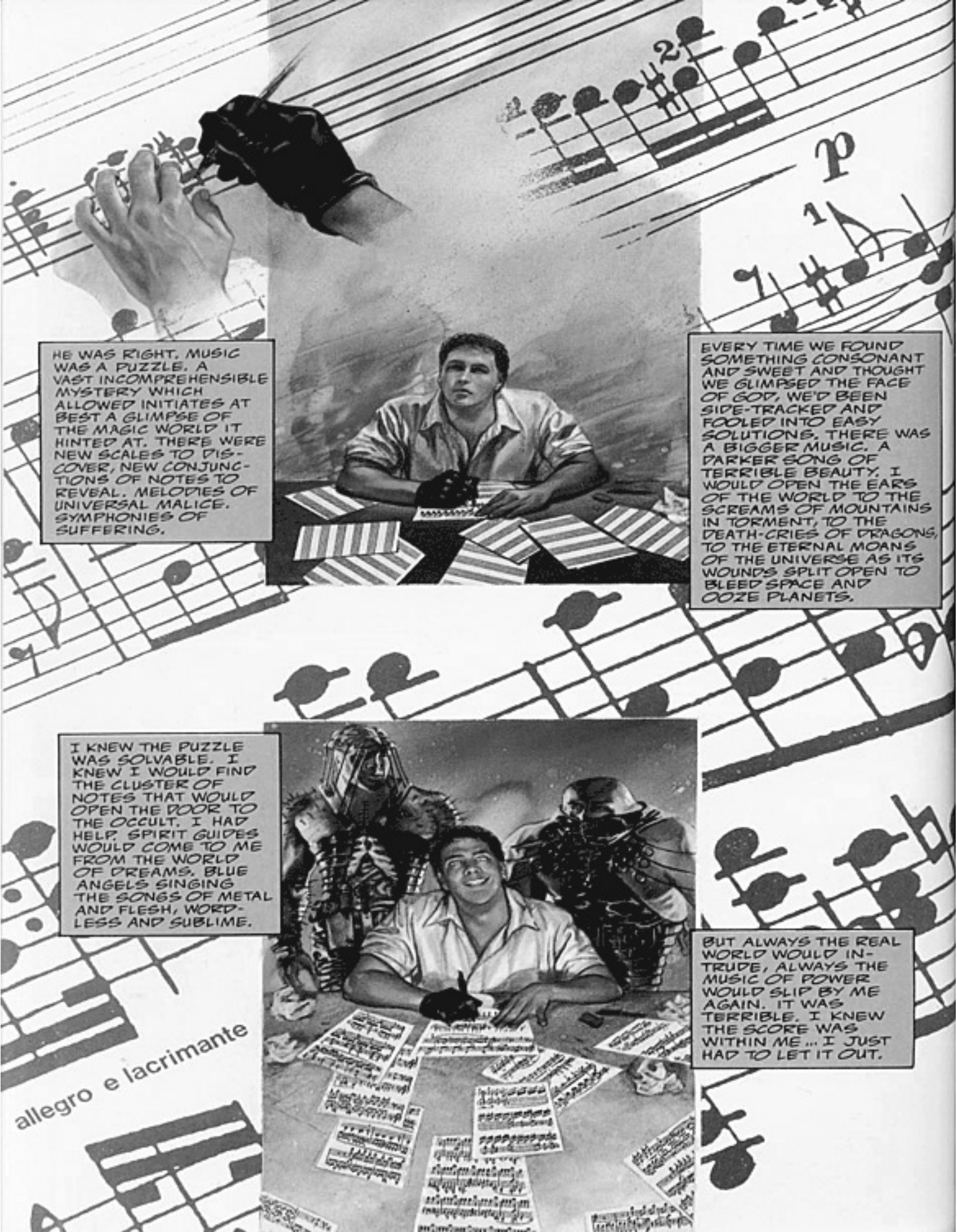
THE SONG WAS BETTER THAN EVER. SHE'D GIVEN ME MORE CLUES TO THE HIDDEN SONATAS.
THIS MIX OF PAIN, PLEASURE AND SECRET AGENDAS WAS THE CLOSEST I'D GOT.

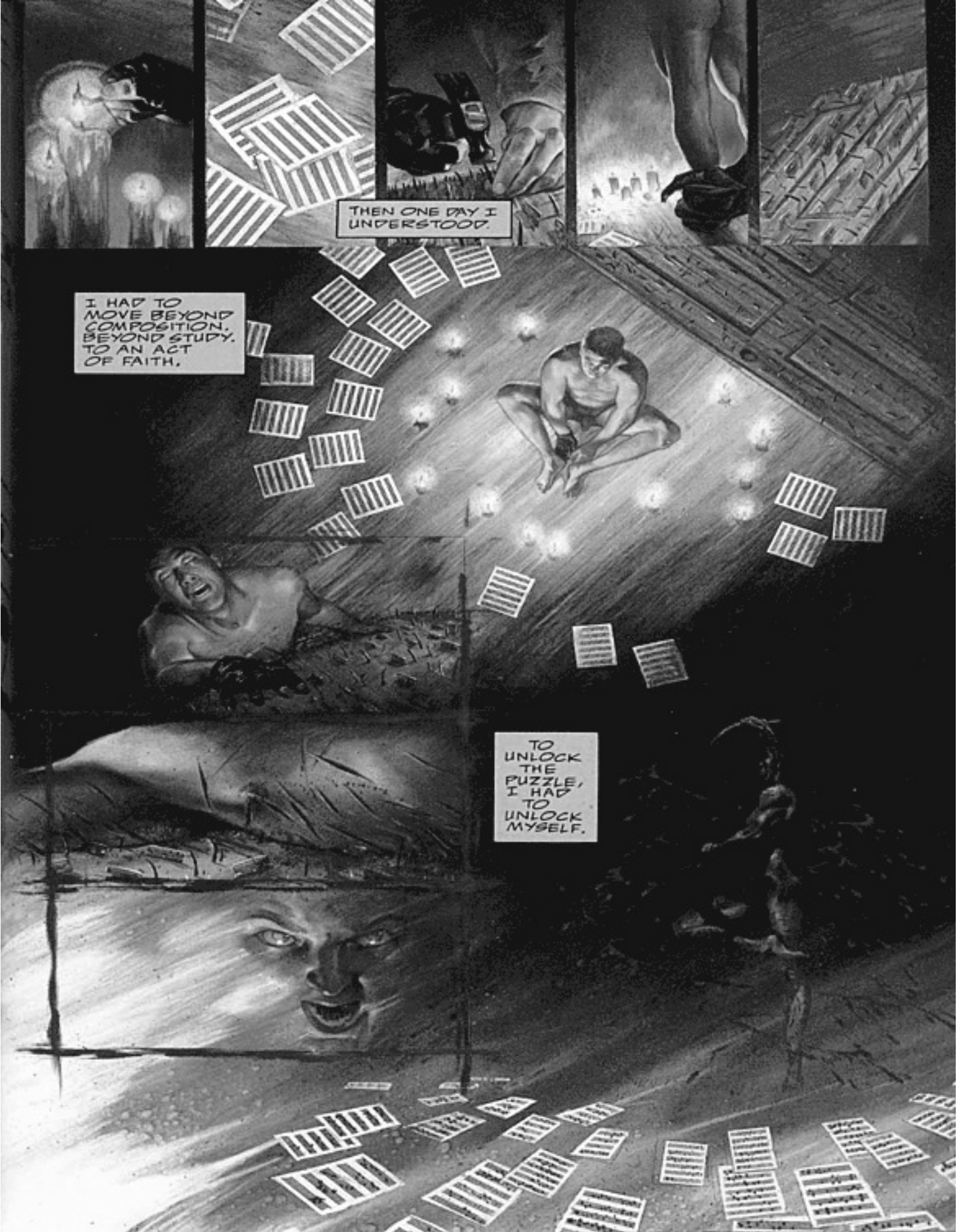

IT WAS DAWN WHEN I GOT HOME.
I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN.
SHOULD HAVE SMELLED THAT GUILTY COCKTAIL OF SWEAT AND RUST.
SHOULD HAVE FELT HOW THE PIANO'S DISCOMFORT PREFIGURED MY PAIN.
BUT DEBORAH'D LEFT ME EXHAUSTED AND INSPIRED.
A DANGEROUS COMBINATION.

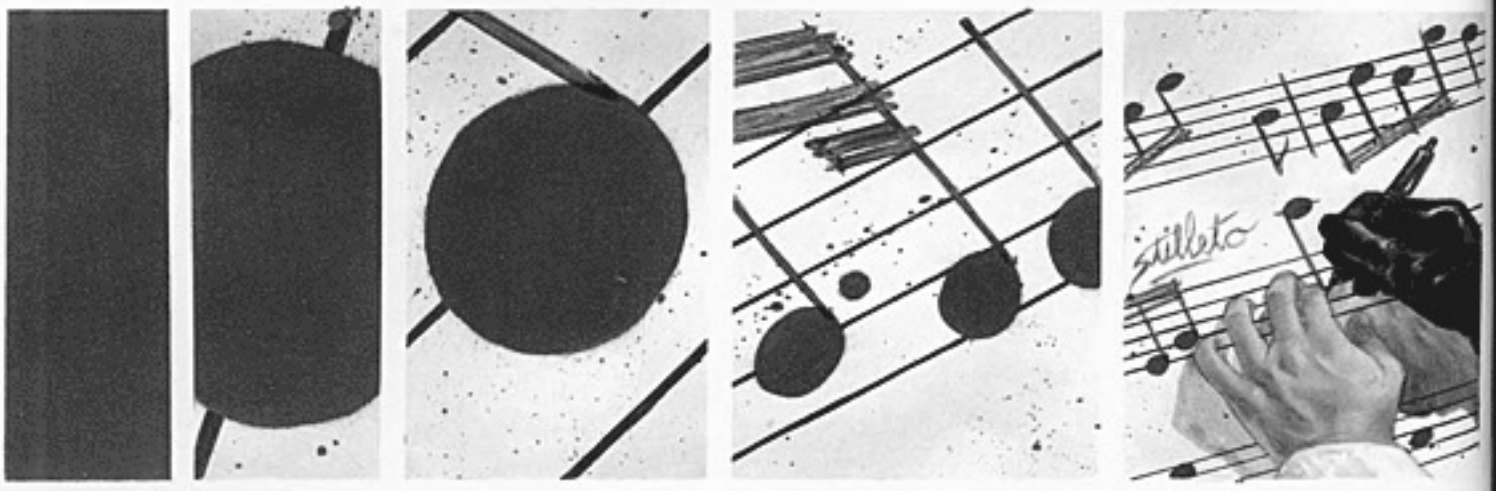
NOTHING WAS PROVED. I DIDN'T WANT IT TO BE. THEY'D GIVEN ME A LOT TO THINK ABOUT. I WAS VERY GRATEFUL.
THE COUNTERPOINT BETWEEN HER MOUTH'S PLATITUDES AND HER BODY'S EXCITEMENT WAS MAGNIFICENT; LIKE PUTTING AN A NATURAL IN A D SHARP MINOR, LIKE BITING INTO A STRAWBERRY AND FINDING AN ANGRY WASP.
I COULD SMELL IT. I COULD TASTE IT. MY BODY BATHED IN THE SWEET SATISFACTION THAT MY MAIMING BROUGHT HER.
DEBORAH EVEN VISITED. THAT WAS ESPECIALLY GOOD.
OUR WORLDS DIVERGED.
STEPHEN GOT THE GLAMOUR. THE TOURS. THE RECORDINGS.
HE BETRAYED DEBORAH IN EVERY TOWN HE PERFORMED IN. I LIKED THAT.

DEBORAH GOT CANCER AND DIED.
I VISITED. SHE SMELLED FABULOUS. FEAR AND PAIN FOUGHT FOR DOMINANCE IN HARMONIES OF ANGUISH.


I GOT WHAT I NEEDED--AND FROM WHICH A CONCERT CAREER MAY HAVE DISTRACTED ME; SPACE AND TIME TO RESEARCH AND COMPOSE. I HAD TO PURSUE THE INSIGHTS I'D BEEN GIVEN.
I WORKED LONG HOURS BUT NOT LONELY ONES. I HAD MY BOOKS IN BRAILLE, MY BOOKS ON TAPE. I HAD CENTURIES OF HIDDEN KNOWLEDGE TO KEEP ME COMPANY.
THE PARISIAN LUNATIC, GERARD DE NERVAL--A POET WHO TOOK LOBSTERS FOR WALKS AND HUNG HIMSELF WITH AN APRON--UNLOCKED ONE DOOR:
"LET US RECOMPOSE THE DISSONANT SCALE AND WE WILL GAIN POWER IN THE WORLD OF THE SPIRITS."


HE WAS RIGHT. MUSIC WAS A PUZZLE. A VAST INCOMPREHENSIBLE MYSTERY WHICH ALLOWED INITIATES AT BEST A GLIMPSE OF THE MAGIC WORLD IT HINTED AT. THERE WERE NEW SCALES TO DISCOVER, NEW CONJUNCTIONS OF NOTES TO REVEAL. MELODIES OF UNIVERSAL MALICE. SYMPHONIES OF SUFFERING.
EVERY TIME WE FOUND SOMETHING CONSONANT AND SWEET AND THOUGHT WE GLIMPSED THE FACE OF GOD, WE'D BEEN SIDE-TRACKED AND FOOLED INTO EASY SOLUTIONS. THERE WAS A BIGGER MUSIC. A DARKER SONG OF TERRIBLE BEAUTY. I WOULD OPEN THE EARS OF THE WORLD TO THE SCREAMS OF MOUNTAINS IN TORMENT, TO THE DEATH-CRIES OF DRAGONS, TO THE ETERNAL MOANS OF THE UNIVERSE AS ITS WOUNDS SPLIT OPEN TO BLEED SPACE AND OOZE PLANETS.
I KNEW THE PUZZLE WAS SOLVABLE. I KNEW I WOULD FIND THE CLUSTER OF NOTES THAT WOULD OPEN THE DOOR TO THE OCCULT. I HAD HELP. SPIRIT GUIDES WOULD COME TO ME FROM THE WORLD OF DREAMS. BLUE ANGELS SINGING THE SONGS OF METAL AND FLESH, WORDLESS AND SUBLIME.
BUT ALWAYS THE REAL WORLD WOULD INTRUDE, ALWAYS THE MUSIC OF POWER WOULD SLIP BY ME AGAIN. IT WAS TERRIBLE. I KNEW THE SCORE WAS WITHIN ME... I JUST HAD TO LET IT OUT.
allegro e lacrimante


THEN ONE DAY I UNDERSTOOD.
I HAD TO MOVE BEYOND COMPOSITION. BEYOND STUDY. TO AN ACT OF FAITH.
TO UNLOCK THE PUZZLE, I HAD TO UNLOCK MYSELF.



A DECADE OF RESEARCH AND COMPOSITION HAD SWELLED MY REPUTATION IF NOT MY BANK BALANCE. I KNEW I COULD GET IT PERFORMED. AND I KNEW WHO I WANTED TO PERFORM IT.

THE AUDIENCE WAS FULL OF THE INFORMED AND THE FASHIONABLE. PEOPLE THAT I KNEW, IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, WOULD APPRECIATE WHAT THEY WERE BEING OFFERED TONIGHT.
I WAS VERY EXCITED. TONIGHT THE WORLD WAS TO HAVE ITS' BLINKERS REMOVED, ITS EAR-PLUGS TAKEN OUT. TONIGHT THE VEIL BETWEEN LIFE AND THE REAL WAS TO BE SHREDDED.

THE PIECE HADN'T BEEN REHEARSED. I'D HAD THEM PREPARE WITH WHAT I CALLED RELATED PIECES. I'D FED THE MEDIA SOME CONCEPTUALIST BULLSHIT REASON FOR THAT. THEY LAPPED IT UP.

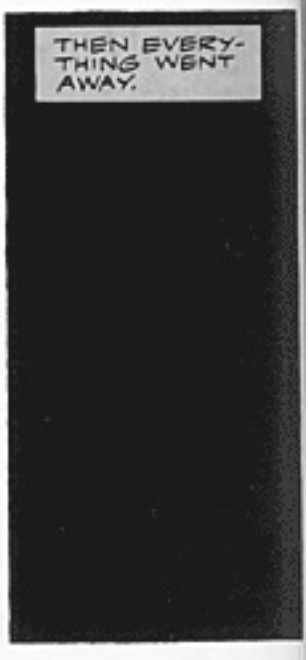
CRISP ATTACK.
GOOD TONE.
MY, HE WAS PLAYING WELL.
THE AUDIENCE'S ENTHUSIASM COULD ONLY JUST BE RESTRAINED.
THE ORCHESTRA PLAYED LIKE MEN POSSESSED.

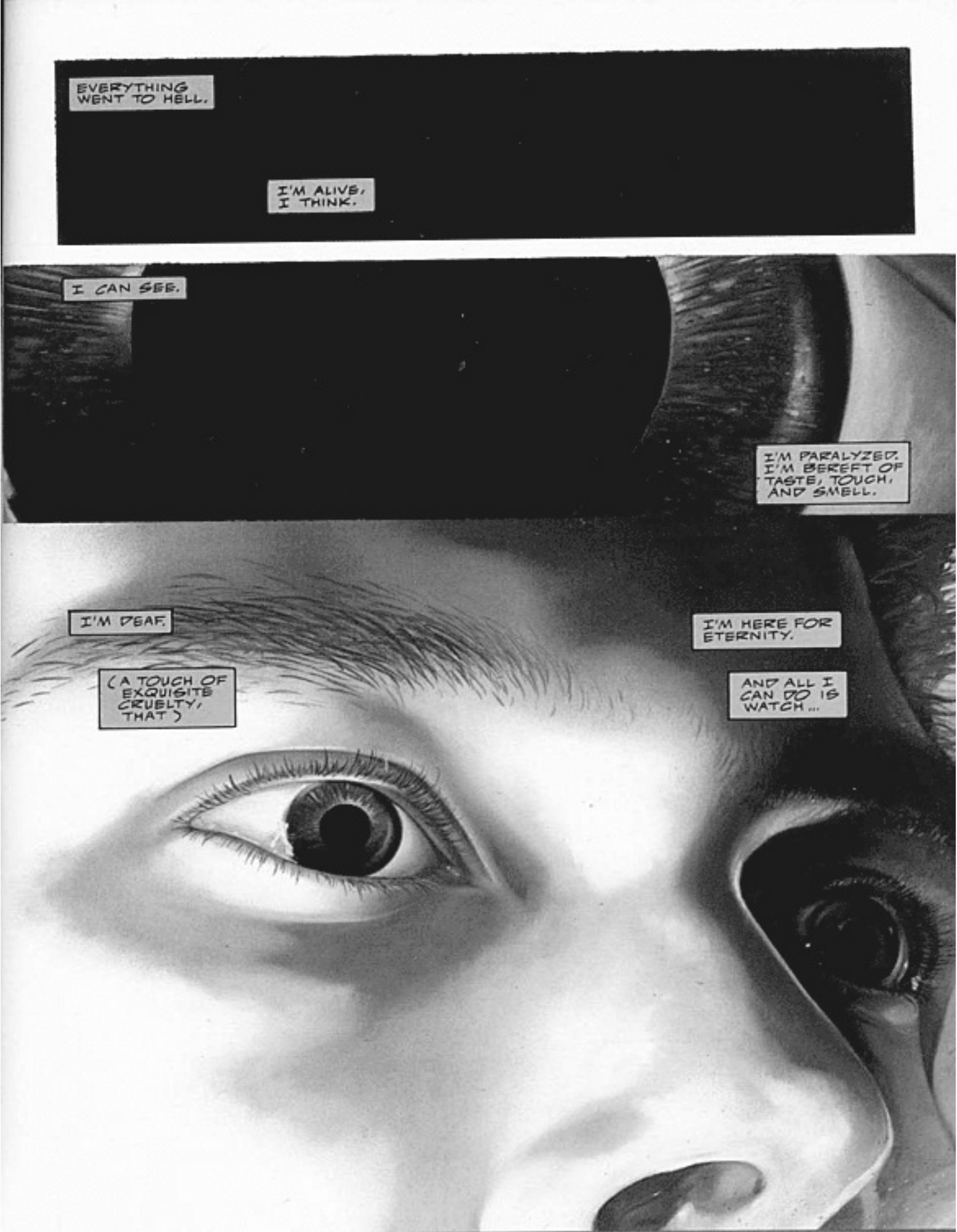
EVERYTHING WAS PERFECT.

EVERYTHING WAS PURE.

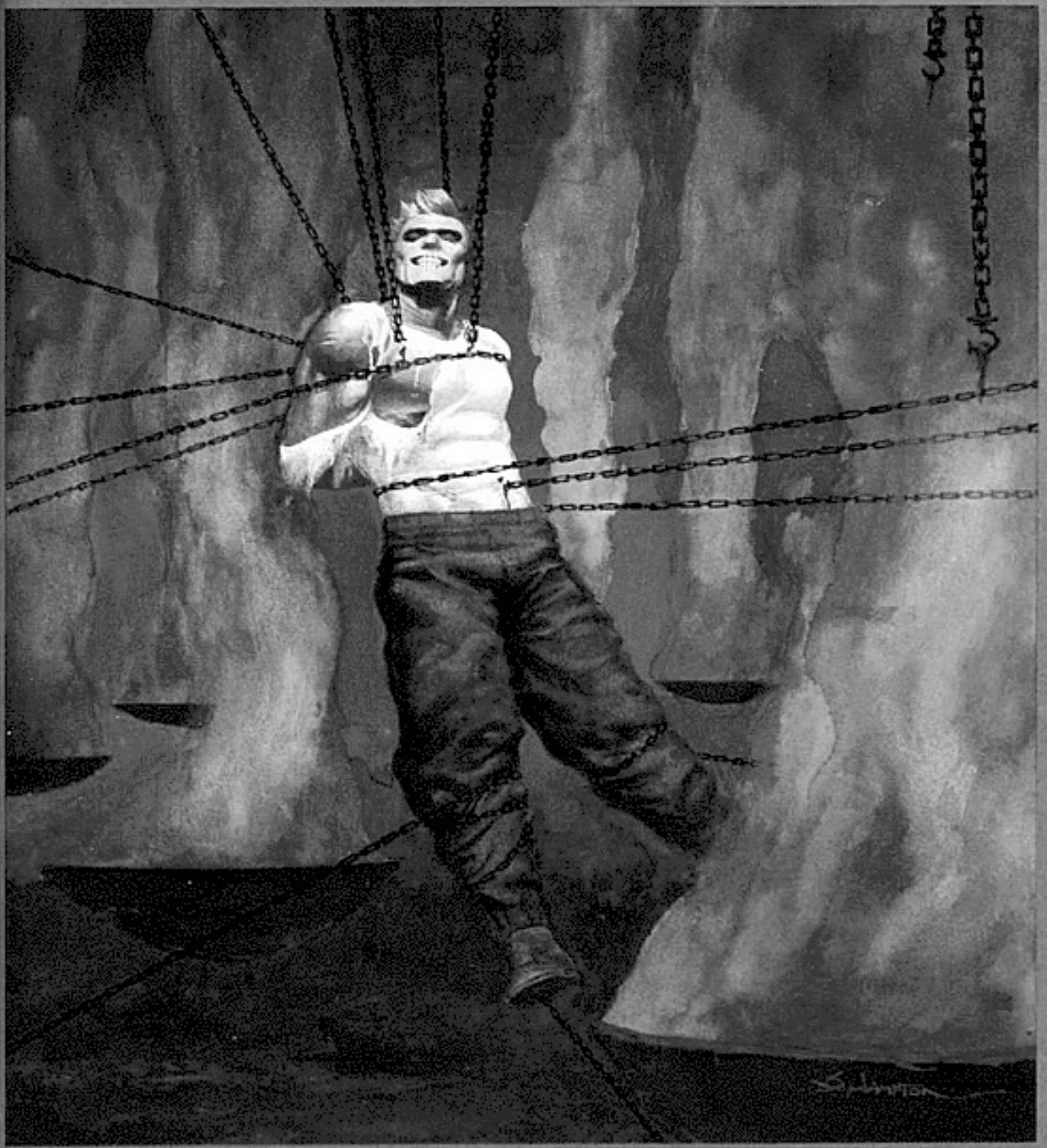
EVERYTHING HAD PASSION.

EVERYTHING WAS CALM.


THEN EVERY-THING WENT AWAY.


EVERYTHING WENT TO HELL.
I'M ALIVE, I THINK.
I CAN SEE.
I'M PARALYZED. I'M BEREFT OF TASTE, TOUCH, AND SMELL.
I'M DEAF.
(A TOUCH OF EXQUISITE CRUELTY, THAT)
I'M HERE FOR ETERNITY.
AND ALL I CAN DO IS WATCH...

"... AS BEAUTY COMES IN AT THE EYE."
The End



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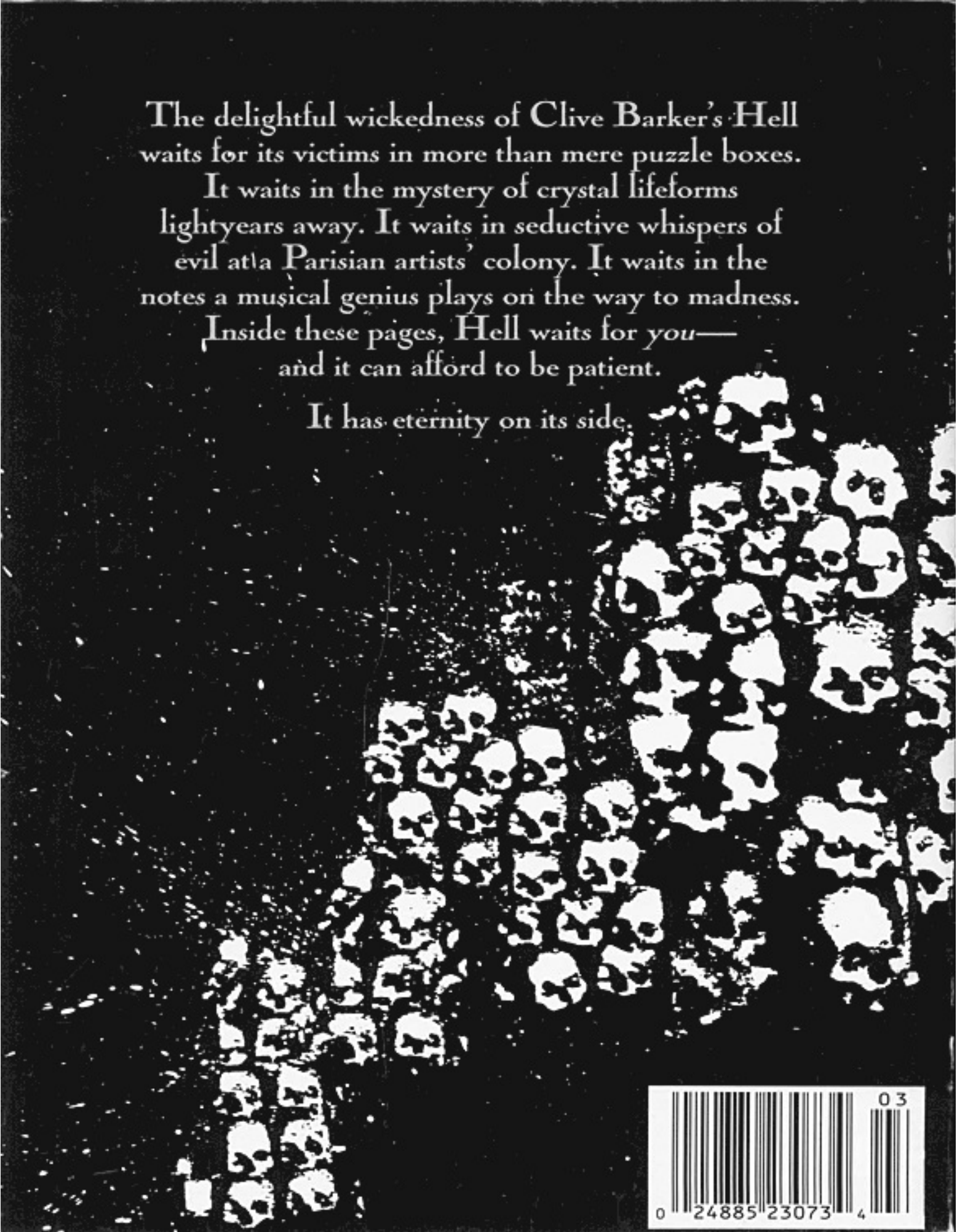
It has eternity on its side.



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